GEORGE ELIOT AND ITALY : A DISCUSSION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENGLISH AND ITALIAN LITERATURE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY THROUGH THE EYES OF GEORGE ELIOT

Donata Maria Margiotta

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
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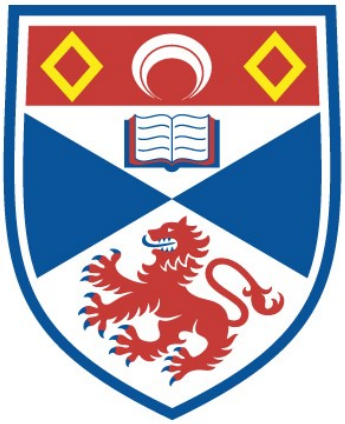

1998

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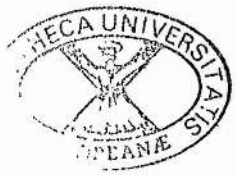

by

Donata Maria Margiotta

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ABSTRACT

It is evident both from George Eliot's biography and from an analysis of her novels that the English novelist showed a deep interest in Italy and its culture. This fact puts forward a double set of questions: first of all whether George Eliot's works were read and studied in 19th century Italy, and, if not, when we can begin to talk of the Italian reception of her works; second, how this involvement in Italy relates to the Victorian cultural context and how it becomes concrete in George Eliot's novels. My analysis of the English novelist's fortune in Italy starts in the second half of the 19th century, and continues throughout the 20th century, when we can talk of a more widespread interest in her works. The fact that 19th century Italy showed a poor interest in George Eliot finds explanation in the nature of the Italian cultural context. It is nevertheless interesting to notice that the major Italian writer of the period, Giovanni Verga, showed in his novels an approach to Naturalism similar to that of George Eliot. As far as the question of Victorian interest in Italy, and especially of George Eliot's, is concerned, we can talk of a diffused interest in the country, which, though it led to different creative realisations, shows an approach to the country and its culture similar in different intellectuals. An analysis of the picture of Italy provided in George Eliot's novel Romola will clarify the nature of her interest in the country and its culture.

I, Donata Maria Margiotta, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 40,000 words in length, has been written by me, that is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous applications for a higher degree.

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I was admitted as a research student in April 1996 and as a candidate for the degree of M.Phil. in June 1997; the higher study of which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1996 and 1997.

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Prefatory Note

Throughout the text quotations from Italian secondary sources are given in translation only, while quotations from Giovanni Verga's works are in English accompanied by their Italian original in footnotes. All translations into English are the present writer's unless otherwise indicated.

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INTRODUCTION

A reader of George Eliot cannot fail to notice the novelist's involvement in Italy. Not only did she go there, but she also showed interest in Italian culture and language, and she dealt with Italy in some of her novels. It will be interesting to analyse the nature of the relationship between the English novelist and the country. I have used the term relationship because I believe that a study focusing on the theme George Eliot and Italy must show a mutual treatment of the subject. On the one hand, it will be worth finding out whether Italian culture has shown interest in George Eliot's works, and, if so, to examine the nature of that concern. On the other hand, it will be useful to point out which kind of picture of Italy Victorian fiction provided its readers with, especially through George Eliot's Romola.

The chronological starting point of my discussion about the Italian reception of George Eliot's works is the second half of the 19th century. In fact, I think it would be appropriate to discover whether Italian contemporary intellectuals knew her works. Such a question implies an analysis of two aspects of Italian culture at that time: on the one hand, the cultural consequences of the newly achieved political unification; on the other hand, the strong and dominant influence of French culture on the Italian approach towards Positivism and Realism. As we will see, these were not favourable conditions for the diffusion of the English novelist's works. Actually, the reception of George Eliot's works in the second half of the 19th century was poor and limited; it will be from the

beginning of the 20th century on that we can talk of the Italian response to the works of the English novelist. The fact that 19th century Italian intellectuals did not show a particular interest in George Eliot's works is not surprising if we consider the nature of Italian culture at that time. Italy had just become a unified State, and this political fact naturally had consequences on the role of culture and of intellectuals in society. Intellectuals were not happy with the contemporary Italian political situation; they felt that the status quo deeply differed from what they had theorised and dreamed of during the *Risorgimento*, which was the period when Italy struggled for political independence. While in that phase of Italian history intellectuals had played a basic role in the construction of the new state, after unification had taken place they felt their role and the role of culture in its entirety was not central any longer. In their writings they pointed out their dissatisfaction with the new political situation and with the consequent cultural context. What they complained about was the fact that with economic development, and the increasingly widespread diffusion of capitalism culture tended to become more and more a matter for the few, rather than an active force in society.

We can take as an example of this discontent among intellectuals Giovanni Verga's Preface to his novel Eva; in it the most important Italian writer of the period points out that he was living in an age interested in attaining external comfort and pleasure, and less and less concerned with culture. We must add, in order to have a clear picture of the Italian cultural context at that time, that the diffusion of culture was actually limited, the level of illiteracy being extremely high. It is clear that such a cultural

context was not favourable to the diffusion of George Eliot's novels. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that the Italian cultural debate focused on those topics which were being discussed all over Europe, Positivism and Realism being the major influences on Italian culture and, more specifically, on literature. Italian intellectuals knew the theories of Darwin, Spencer, Comte and Mill and were influenced by them as far as the building of a Positivistic system of ideas was concerned. However, if we turn our attention to literature, we cannot fail to notice that the major influence on Italian literary works came from France. The Italian approach to literary movements such as Realism and Naturalism was influenced by Balzac, Flaubert, Zola and the other French Naturalists' ideas, and these were the contemporary foreign names almost exclusively mentioned in Italian reviews. In this cultural context only one of George Eliot's novels, Daniel Deronda, was translated, and a single critical study about her was published. It was from the beginning of the new century onwards that Eliot's novels started to be translated into Italian, and that critical studies started to appear. Among them there are both monographs and essays dealing with a single novel.

This analysis of the Italian 19th century cultural context puts forward another interesting question: whether it is possible to draw a comparison between George Eliot's approach to Realism and Naturalism and that of Giovanni Verga, the exponent of Italian Naturalism. The reason for comparing the two authors is that they are considered the exponents respectively of English and of Italian Naturalism, and that their theoretical explanations of what they meant by the terms Realism and Naturalism show a similar

approach in the two authors towards the main literary tendency of the period. In chapter XVII of Adam Bede George Eliot expresses the intention of giving a truthful picture of the events she was going to narrate, as if she were in the witness-box. Besides, she declares her interest in commonplace, everyday settings, events and characters. These words of George Eliot remind the Italian reader that Giovanni Verga declares the same intentions in the Preface to what is often regarded as his masterpiece, the novel I Malavoglia. The Italian author maintains that his novel is a sincere and dispassionate study of the development of human passions as they manifest themselves in the lowest social spheres. It will be interesting to see how the two writers realised these intentions, to what extent the different cultural contexts they belonged to allowed a similar approach towards an objective representation of reality and a similar treatment of ordinary events. It is when analysing the narrative techniques employed by the two authors that the most evident difference between them comes out. Whereas Verga was deeply concerned with the search for an impartial mode of narration which gave the readers the impression that the story was self-written, which eliminated the presence of the writer, George Eliot employed the omniscient narrator convention, which is not the point of view associated with an impartial and objective representation of reality. This point is discussed more fully in chapter II below.

The other set of questions the theme George Eliot and Italy raises is concerned with the nature of the Victorian involvement in Italy. In Middlemarch we read:

> To those who have looked at Rome with the quickening power of knowledge which breathes a growing soul into all historical shapes, and traces out the suppressed transitions, which unite all contrasts, Rome may still be the spiritual centre and interpreter of the world. But let them conceive one more historical contrast: the gigantic broken revelations of that Imperial and Papal city thrust abruptly on the notions of a girl who had been brought up in English and Swiss Puritanism, fed on meagre Protestant histories and on art chiefly of the hand-screen sort; a girl whose ardent nature turned all her small allowance of knowledge into principles, fusing her actions into their mould, and whose quick emotions gave the most abstract things the quality of a pleasure or a pain; a girl who had lately become a wife, and from the enthusiastic acceptance of untried duty found herself plunged in tumultuous preoccupation with the personal lot.[1]

Such a passage puts forward the question of why George Eliot showed interest in Italy and its culture, what Italy came to symbolise for her, and how her involvement in the country is related to Victorian literature. Actually, many Victorian intellectuals dealt with Italy in both their theoretical and creative works. Generally speaking, we can say that Italy represented for them the other world as opposed to their everyday world . Their interest in Italy stems from a feeling of dissatisfaction with contemporary England, with its fast economical development and with the consequences it had on ordinary life. They

[1] George Eliot, Middlemarch, New York: Bantam Books, 1992, pp.176-7

saw in Italy either the uncontaminated southern country opposed to the civilised North, or the country where the Renaissance civility developed. The novel by George Eliot I am going to analyse in order to point out the nature of the novelist's involvement with Italy is Romola, which is entirely set in Renaissance Florence. It is therefore relevant to my discussion to deal with the picture of Renaissance Italy provided by Victorian intellectuals both in their theoretical and creative writings. In order to have a deep and thorough understanding of Romola it will be necessary to discuss Ruskin, Symonds and Pater and their view of Renaissance Italy.

The picture of the Renaissance Ruskin provides his readers with is very different from that of Symonds and Pater. The former considered the Renaissance as the period when the decay of Italy began, as an age of moral decay and degeneracy, and opposed it to the Middle Ages. He considered the Middle Ages as characterised by liberty in every aspect of social and cultural life, and the Renaissance as characterised by slavery. The two later writers gave a complex picture of the Renaissance, which was characterised for them not only by a new interest in classical culture, but by the emancipation of reason, by the resurrection of man's freedom as opposed to the dark and narrow Middle Ages. As I will show, the picture of Italy provided in Romola is linked both with Ruskin's and with Symonds' and Pater's view of the Renaissance. The novelist gave a detailed and precise historical description of the period, but, at the same time, she used the Italian setting to develop the ethical theme implied in the story of Romola. The picture of the Renaissance which emerges emphasises the corruption and degeneracy of the period, which calls to

mind Ruskin's view of the Renaissance. Nevertheless, George Eliot view of the Renaissance focused on the complexity of the period, which she perceived as swinging between medieval values and the new values emerging from the new attitude towards man and his role in the universe. These issues form the subject of chapters III and IV.

I. The Reception of George Eliot's Works in Italy

> Italy has been influenced by English literature only indirectly, through the echoes English culture had in Paris, and the imitation of English works and of cultural behaviours has been sporadic, provincial and has never involved the creative works of a genius as it had happened in England for Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton. [1]

This is what Mario Praz writes in an essay about the relationship between English and Italian culture, giving an important testimony about the kind of relationship that has always existed between English and Italian cultures. Praz's opinion that the English influence on Italian culture has been 'sporadic, provincial', and the fact that he draws attention to the French mediation is in accord with the results of my bibliographical research about the reception of George Eliot's works in Italy. The period I am interested in is the second half of the 19th century, precisely from 1860 to the end of the century. In this period Positivism and Realism, which were the strongest influences on contemporary European culture, and also on George Eliot's cultural education, had begun to spread into Italian culture. I thought it would be interesting to discover if and to what extent Italian readers knew the English novelist, and if Italian intellectuals of the time showed interest in contemporary English literature and particularly in George Eliot. She can be considered

[1] M. Praz, 'Rapporti tra la Letteratura italiana e la Letteratura Inglese', in Letterature comparate, Ed. A. Viscardi, C. Pellegrini, A. Croce, M. Praz etc.,Milano: Carlo Manzorati Editore,1948, p. 146

the exponent of English Realism and her works show some similarities with the novels of Giovanni Verga,[2] who is the major exponent of Italian Realism. Therefore, it is interesting to discover whether this fact stimulated the diffusion of George Eliot's novels in Italy, or not.

The results of my bibliographical research show that both Italian intellectuals and the Italian common reader (who, as we will realise in the next pages, cannot actually be considered 'common') did not pay attention to George Eliot's novels. They showed a limited interest in the whole English contemporary culture. I particularly looked for translations of George Eliot's novels into Italian and for critical essays, and I went through some of the periodicals and magazines of the period,[3] such as Rivista Europea , Nuova Antologia, La Letteratura, L'Opinione Letteraria. As the titles indicate, they are all periodicals and magazines dealing specifically with literary matters. The title Rivista Europea clearly indicates that the review is concerned with European culture. They can all be considered high-brow periodicals. Nuova Antologia, for example, was the most important organ of diffusion of Italian culture after the political unity; it was concerned with philosophy, politics, economy, science and literature. The results of this bibliographical research show that in the second half of the 19th century only the translation of Daniel Deronda, one critical study, and a few short and indirect mentions of the English novelist appeared in the periodical Nuova Antologia. In order to have a more exact picture

[2] I will deal with this question in chapter 2.
[3] In the volumes available at the University Libraries in Naples.

of the Italian reception of George Eliot's works, I looked for translations and critical studies published in the 20th century.

In this chapter I will deal with the analysis of the information about George Eliot published in the 19th century, and I will try to explain the social and cultural reason for this poor interest. I will also discuss the translations of George Eliot's novels and the critical studies of her work published in the 20th century.

1) The Italian Reception of George Eliot's Works in the 19th Century

The only George Eliot novel to be translated into Italian in the 19th century was Daniel Deronda. This translation was made by the lawyer Cesare Olivetti and was published in 1882-83. The Italian critic Pietro De Logu notices that this is the first and the only Italian translation of the novel.[4] Mario Praz points out that 'though George Eliot had given her permission to it',[5] she had never realised how bad and deficient it was; he writes that 'all the characters' analyses are inexorably cut'.[6]

It is certainly important that a translation of a novel by George Eliot appeared in Italy only five years after the publication of the book in England; nevertheless, it is worth noticing that no other novel by George Eliot was translated in that period, whereas we

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[4] P. De Logu , La Narrativa di George Eliot, Bari: Adriatica Editrice.1969,p.231
[5] M. Praz, La Crisi dell'Eroe Nel Romanzo Vittoriano, Firenze: Sansoni, 1981. p. 378
[6] ibid.

know that Adam Bede, for example, was soon translated into Dutch, German, French and Hungarian.[7]

The single critical study about George Eliot published in the 19th century is entitled George Eliot, la sua Vita nei suoi Romanzi .[8] It was written by Giovanni Negri, a Milanese intellectual and politician, and was published in 1891. Michele Scherillo in his speech Giovanni Negri , Cittadino e Pensatore, published in Ultimi Saggi. Problemi di Religione,di Politica e di Letteratura [9] (a book containing the last essays by Negri), writes that before becoming a senator Negri was already famous among intellectuals for his historical and literary essays, for his political speeches, for his book about Bismarck, for his booklet about religious crisis and for his book about George Eliot.

The main assumption of Negri's monograph about the English novelist is that her art is characterised by a truthful representation of reality. He points out that George Eliot regarded every single element of the world as worthy of analysis; nothing, according to her, was uninteresting or did not deserve to be studied. Negri links this attitude with the English novelist's Positivist background; he notes that Eliot did not base her novels on preconceived ideas, but wrote only what she learned from experience. Negri regards chapter XVII of Adam Bede, where George Eliot declares her intentions as a novelist, as the first and the best declaration of artistic Realism ever made. He notices that before the

[7] P. De Logu underlined this fact at p. 101 of his La narrativa di George Eliot, op. cit.
[8] G. Negri, George Eliot,la sua Vita e i suoi Romanzi, Milano: Baldini .Castoldi & C.,1891.In this study I will refer to the 1903 edition of the book.

development of the realistic literary tendency writers emphasised the positive aspects of reality, whereas realistic writers dealt with the ugly side of it. In both cases, the critic suggests, the pictures of the external world provided were exaggerated. Negri notes the lack of an objective, and therefore truly scientific, psychological analysis of human souls in the works of the Realists. George Eliot, on the other hand, represented the world and men as they really were, without making them either more attractive or uglier; and at the same time her novels provide the reader with a careful and profound psychological insight into the human soul. Negri considers her ' the prince of the psychological novelists'.[10] Negri believed that George Eliot did not need descriptive passages in order to introduce and describe her characters, their ideas, and their attitudes. He suggests that the characters themselves show all this through dialogues and action; the writer, he maintains, disappears completely. As we will see, this idea about George Eliot's narrative technique was not common in Italian criticism of the English novelist. More commonly, critics point out the presence in her novels of too many comments from the narrator. As far as the choice of setting and characters was concerned, Negri notes that situations and characters are always taken from a humble, modest context; George Eliot's art looks for poetry in common things. Nevertheless, her analysis is so deep, the human soul is represented in such a truthful way that '... the reader forgets completely the humility of the subject and feels he is reading about the tragedy of destiny and humanity'.[11]

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[9] G. Negri, Ultimi Saggi. Problemi di Religione,di Politica e di Letteratura, Milano:Ulrico Hoepli,1904
[10] G. Negri, George Eliot..., op. cit.,p. 82
[11] ibid.,p.84

The other basic idea of Negri's criticism is the belief that George Eliot's novels are concerned with a moral teaching. The moral concept implied in them is the condemnation of egoism. Selfish individuals are represented as caring only for themselves, as having only their own advantage in mind, as not being concerned with others. This leads them to a wrong attitude towards life, vitiated by their illusions and desires. They do not find happiness because they look for it where it does not exists. The egoists of her novels (the critic mentions Hetty, Rosamund, Gwendolen, Melema, Silas Marner, Casaubon. Bulstrode, Transome, Grandcourt), though so different from one another, all come to realise they have embraced the wrong attitude towards life. This is the reason why their hopes and desires are destroyed. Another moral teaching which, according to Negri, emerges from George Eliot's novels, is that wise and balanced individuals are those who have a clear view of the world, and adapt their strength and actions to reality. The example he chooses here is Tom Tulliver as opposed to his sister Maggie. Negri points out that Maggie's qualities are deeper and more valuable than Tom's, nevertheless, in practice, it is Tom's attitude towards life which is the right one.

The other feature of George Eliot's novels Negri underlines is the conservative view of life implied in them, despite the novelist's positivist frame of mind and despite her trust in human progress. She seems to suggest to her reader that the past world was less unhappy than the present one because it was more linked to its traditions, to its origins, to its memories. Her novels seem to point out that man is happy if he adapts himself to the

context where he lives. This concept is present, according to Negri, in Adam Bede, Silas Marner, The Mill on the Floss, and Middlemarch.

Relevant to this discussion is the fact that the critic wonders why such a great writer was not popular outside England. His answer to the question stems from the assumption that George Eliot's art is realistic. Her novels are a truthful reproduction of the English world with its habits, customs, and characteristics; therefore, they could be completely and truly understood only in that context. Furthermore, the novelist shows a realistic approach also in her choice of language; she makes her humble characters speak in the language of ordinary people. This means that the translation of her novels is extremely difficult; and this is another obstacle to the circulation of her works abroad.

Mario Praz in his essay about George Eliot does not mention Negri's book among his references, and neither does Pietro De Logu. Silvano Sabbadini is the only critic who mentions this book, in the bibliography of Italian criticism of George Eliot which he added to his introduction to the Italian translation of Middlemarch. Sabbadini writes that this book is interesting merely 'archaeologically'.[12]

As noted above, I have found some indirect mentions of George Eliot in Nuova Antologia. The volume dated 1883 mentions the series of books concerning important women edited by Allen and points out the fact that a book about George Eliot by Mathilde

Blind had already been published at that time. It informs its readers that George Eliot's biography by her husband, John Cross, was going to be published, and that Sidney Lanier's work about the English novel and its development until George Eliot had just appeared. In the same volume George Eliot is mentioned when discussing The History of English Literature by Augustin Filon, who maintained that the author of Middlemarch showed a deep insight into the characters' personality.

2) Why George Eliot's Reception in 19th Century Italy was so poor

In my opinion, the lack of interest in George Eliot and her works in Italy in the 19th century was due to the peculiar political, social and cultural background in Italy at that time, and to the fact that the strongest foreign influence on Italian culture was France.

In 1860 Italy had just become a united state and many problems needed to be solved in order to make that unity real. First of all, unity was not perfect; in fact, Venice and Rome did not belong to the Italian State yet. Secondly, the monarchical solution did not satisfy many political and intellectual groups. The intellectuals were disappointed with the situation; they felt that a deep discrepancy existed between the actual State and the ideal State they had theorised and dreamt of during the so called 'Risorgimento'.[13] Therefore, they condemned the new situation in their writings. Their relationship with the

[12] S. Sabbadini, 'Introduzione', in G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. S.Sabbadini, Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1983,p.XXXVI

real State was dialectical. The intellectuals saw that Italy was moving towards industrial and capitalistic development and complained about this fact, focusing only on its negative elements. They considered this movement the cause of the crisis of cultural values, of the destruction of their old heroic function. During the 'Risorgimento' they had fulfilled a very important function, they had been the State-builders; as the critic Alberto Asor Rosa points out, their role had been to create an ideological unity, to prepare,

> ...most of all with the help of literature and philosophy, a system of ideological ideas aimed at creating and giving an actual meaning to the concept of nation, which was for everyone a basic concept. [14]

They felt that culture no longer played the important and basic social role it had played in the past. Carducci, who wanted to follow the example of the poets Alfieri, Foscolo and Manzoni, realised how anachronistic his intention was, since poetry had become completely useless.[15] The most important Italian writer of the period, Giovanni Verga, noted in the preface to his novel Eva (1873) that art was a superfluous element in the contemporary social and cultural context, which aimed only at achieving material comfort and pleasures. The intellectual debate focused on this polemic against the political and social situation. Actually, when I went through some of the periodicals of this period I noticed that many articles were concerned with political problems. Furthermore, some of

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[13] This is the term used to describe the historical process which during the 19th century led to the foundation of Italy as an independent and united state.
[14] A.Asor Rosa, 'La Cultura', in Storia d' Italia, vol.IV. Torino: Einaudi, 1974,p.822

the most important writers of this period dealt with these problems in their works. Carducci's poems, for example, were concerned with the degeneracy of the contemporary political situation. In his poem Per Vincenzo Caldesi, Otto Mesi dopo la sua Morte he compared Rome with Byzantium, symbol of corruption and decadence. Verga in his works complained and reacted in his own peculiar way against the contemporary situation; De Roberto in his most famous novel I Vicerè underlined the fact that after unification Italy had not changed at all, that the old corruption and injustice still existed, and that it was impossible to change this situation.

What I am saying is that there were too many intellectual questions to discuss in Italy and intellectuals were too busy dealing with these questions to concentrate their attention on foreign literary matters and authors, who could not directly help them with the construction of the new State.[16] Furthermore, it was difficult for Italian intellectuals to obtain foreign books. We know, for example, that Roberto Ardigò (one of the exponents of Italian Positivism) had not yet read Spencer when he wrote La Psicologia come Scienza Positiva (1870). In a letter to Pasquale Villari dated 18 April 1871 he explained that the reason why he knew Spencer only by name was that the philosopher's books were not available in his city libraries and bookshops, and he could not afford to buy them from abroad. He complained about the fact that there were many new books he could not afford to buy. These words testify to the difficulties which Italian intellectuals faced when

[15] That is what Carducci wrote in the Preface to his Poems (Firenze, 1871)
[16] As we will see below they were influenced by foreign cultures, and also by the English one, as far as the construction of the positivistic system was concerned.

researching and studying, and explain that the circulation of foreign books was restricted to well-known authors, who were, as we will see below, mostly French.

The problem Italian intellectuals faced, underlined by Ardigò's experience, leads to the question of the limited cultural circulation in Italy in that period. The fact that an intellectual could not afford to buy books shows that also among intellectuals the circulation of culture was restricted. Asor Rosa pointed to the restricted number of intellectuals in the middle class, and complained about the absence of a middle-brow culture among the main social groups, which was an obstacle to cultural and scientific development. He noted:

> The country of the great humanistic tradition was, also in this respect, backward in comparison with the majority of European countries, such as France, England, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, etc. [17]

The main obstacle to the circulation of culture in 19th century Italy was the high level of illiteracy. The historian C. M. Cipolla estimated that in Italy at this time more than half of the population were illiterate. According to Asor Rosa, in 1861 75% of the population was illiterate; in 1862-63 only a very small percentage of 11 to 18 year olds continued to go to school after the Primary School and only a small part of the population was able to

[17] A. Asor Rosa, op. cit.,p.842

speak the national language.[18] This obviously means that cultural debate was a matter for a very limited social group and that intellectuals were busy trying to solve this problem. It was necessary to create and renovate the school system at all levels of instruction and throughout the new state.

The Italian cultural context of the period was also influenced by what was happening elsewhere in Europe. Cultural debate was influenced by new scientific theories and by the positivistic ideology, which were widespread in France, England, Germany, etc. As Carlo A. Madrignani suggests, the greatest part of the Italian intellectuals of that period felt

> The necessity of a "scientific philosophy", of an objective method useful for the analysis of the present and the past, of society, nature and history. New European models were proposed in every discipline, traditional or recent, in order to base the study on "facts", on reality, and to represent life as it really was.[19]

The main centres of Italian culture in the 19th century were in the North of the country, especially in Milan, the only city with a true, lively, intellectual life similar to elsewhere in Europe. It is in this cultural context that we can talk of English influence on Italian

[18] ibid.,pp. 840-41
[19] C.A. Madrignani, F. Angelini, Cultura, narrativa e teatro nell'eta' del Positivismo, Bari: Laterza, 1990, p. 3

culture. Charles Darwin's theories became widespread and his works Origin of Species and The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex were translated into Italian respectively in 1864 and 1872. Also the philosophy of Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill became a basic part of the Italian positivist tradition. Some of their works were translated into Italian in the 1880s, or they were available in French translation. Spencer's Principles of Psychology, for example, was available in the French translation of 1874, and John Stuart Mill's Principles of Political Economy was translated in 1851, and he was the subject of some critical studies. It is clear that Italian Positivists felt the need to be part of the contemporary European philosophic and scientific debate. Italian intellectuals compared their ideas and thoughts with 'the English cultural production, with the German one and most of all with the French one'.[20] English culture influenced Italy one as far as scientific and philosophic debate was concerned. Italian intellectuals needed a basis in order to build a philosophic system which could support their ideas and their literary works, and Darwin, Spencer, Mill were certainly important for Italian intellectuals in this respect. In literature, however, it appears that Italian writers were influenced mostly by French literature. On a theoretical level, Hippolyte Taine was very important for Italian intellectuals, because his ideas and works stimulated them to use the positivist method not only in the field of philosophy, but also in the humanities. In creative works Italian writers were certainly not influenced by the contemporary English works. Writers like Trollope or George Eliot, who can be considered exponents of the English Realism are hardly mentioned by the Italian writers of the period. Giacomo Debenedetti, an influential

[20] ibid.,p.5

scholar in this field, who studied Verga and knew George Eliot, maintains that in the 19th century Italy tried to reach the level of European literature and 'most of all of the French one, which was the easiest to assimilate'.[21] Asor Rosa points out that Italian *veristi* [22] were influenced by Gerard de Nerval, Champfleury, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Maupassant. I had evidence of this almost exclusive interest in French literature when I went through some of the periodicals of the period. In the volume of Nuova Antologia of 1872, for example, there were some articles about the relation between Italy and France. In the volume dated 1883 the section about foreign literature (which was edited by Angelo De Gubernatis, a Torinese intellectual) was concerned with French literature, and in particular with Zola, Cherbuliez, with the history of English literature by Augustin Filon, and with some German literature. The only articles dealing with English literature I have found are a review of an Italian translation of some tales by Dickens, contained in Nuova Antologia of 1874, and an article about Shelley and Leopardi, contained in Nuova Antologia of 1883.

From what we have said above it is clear why it is not surprising that in the period from 1860 till the end of the century George Eliot was not known in Italy.

[21] G. Debenedetti, Verga e il Naturalismo, Milano: Garzanti, 1983, pp.40-41

[22] This is the term created in Italy to designate Italian writers who followed the European realistic and naturalistic models.

3) Translations of George Eliot's Novels in the 20th Century

At the beginning of the 20th century translations of some of George Eliot's novels began to be published, and others continued to appear throughout the century. Before dealing with them, I shall briefly discuss the main features of the century's cultural context.

The 20th century Italian cultural context has generally been characterised by a lack of absolute values and by a relationship between art and the historical or political context. This led to a search for a new code of interpretation of reality, which implied also the employment of new stylistical devices. The beginning of the century witnessed the collapse of positivistic values. The scientific interpretation of reality, according to which everything was known by man, was no longer considered appropriate. This, naturally, implied the absence of certainties, of absolutes the individual could refer to, of a pre-determined code of interpretation of the world. Intellectuals felt there was a hidden, and therefore deeper, part of reality which needed to be analysed. They wanted to explore what was beyond the real world, and considered realistic art, which dealt with a truthful representation of reality, as limiting and narrow. Intellectual debate was concerned with the historical, political and social problems of the period.

Three periods can be distinguished in a discussion about the cultural context of 20th century Italy: a first one going from the end of the 19th century to the First World War, the period between the two World Wars and the one after the Second World War. During the first period the cultural centres were Trieste, Milan, Turin, Florence, Rome, Naples. The most important intellectuals were Giovanni Pascoli and Gabriele D'Annunzio, whose works are characterised by a link with the realistic theories, but at the same time by the will to overcome them and to find new means of expression. In fact, their experiences are linked to those of the symbolists and decadents, as far as themes are concerned, and to those of the impressionists and expressionists, as far as stylistic devices are concerned.

In the period between the two wars culture was generally related with the political debates. However, one cannot fail to notice that there were intellectuals affirming the autonomous value of culture. The most important cultural events were the rediscovery of the novel form, which had been neglected in the previous century; the discovery of American literature; the theatrical experience of Pirandello; the development of the cinema. The common trait of the literary works of this period is the search for values, for a code of beliefs useful in the interpretation of reality, and a parallel search for new forms of expression, both linguistic and stylistic. If we go through the list of the major intellectuals and cultural movements of the period, we will encounter names like Svevo, Pirandello, Marinetti and the Futuristi, the Ermetici, whose ideas and works were all characterised by the search for new forms of interpretation of reality and of the role of man in reality. This meant also a search for new forms of expression. These intellectuals all experimented with

new approaches to the different means of expression and new stylistic and linguistic devices.

The period after the Second World War was characterised by the developments of cultural institutions like publishing houses, newspapers and periodicals, by the birth of public TV, by a wider response to foreign cultures. A major feature of the cultural context was still the link with politics; poets and novelists debate about Fascism and anti-Fascism. deal with sociological problems, with the problems of the South of Italy. The novel Cristo si è fermato a Eboli by Carlo Levi, for example, is concerned with the situation of Southern Italy.

The date usually considered as the end of the post-war period is the year 1960. Intellectuals have now gained a full awareness of the historical change, and some of them have started to react against the status quo. They are all concerned with the analysis of the nature of the new society. As examples I can mention Volponi and Pasolini. The former in the novel Memoriale, for example, examines the importance industry has gained in human relations; Pasolini's works, instead, are examples of a refusal of the new-born society.

As far as relations with foreign cultures are concerned, we notice a widening in the response to and knowledge of other cultures. Generally speaking, we can say that intellectuals felt their role could no longer be restricted to the national dimension. They looked for a new contact with foreign cultures. However, we must acknowledge that

Fascism and the nationalistic fervour animating it promoted a closure of Italian culture. Nevertheless, the fact that reviews like Il Baretti and Solaria were published in that context is very important. Il Baretti was founded in 1924 by Pietro Gobetti. It was characterised by a polemic against the limits of a provincial nationalism and in favour of a European dimension. The review dealt with Joyce, Proust and Russian literature; it introduced to its readers texts by Schiller, Rilke, Chekhov, etc. Solaria (1926-36) was characterised by the same openness towards European cultures. It showed attention to Proust, for instance, and to the Jewish aspect of European culture represented by Kafka and Joyce. Towards the middle of the 1930s a new interest in American literature began to appear in Italian culture. The United States with their conflicts between old and new, city and country, poor and rich became a myth for the intellectuals opposing Fascismo, who compared the young and dynamic culture of America with the suffocating atmosphere of Italian Fascism. The publication by Elio Vittorini in 1942 of an anthology of American writers entitled Americana was an important cultural event in Italy. In his La Letteratura del Ventennio Nero (1948) Alberto Moravia points out that, in spite of the obstacles interposed, Italian culture maintained important relations with foreign cultures. He mentions the influence of Du Bos, Benda, Kierkegaard, Kafka, Proust, Woolf, Joyce. He notes that some series of books concerned with foreign authors had begun to be published. The series 'The Great Foreign Writers' published by UTET Press (founded in Turin in 1854), which included George Eliot is an example of this.

Translations of some of George Eliot's novels began to appear in Italy at the beginning of the new century. In 1906 the first translation of Romola was published. The second one, by E. Franceschini, was published in 1920. A translation of The Sad Story of Rev. Amos Barton was published in Milan in 1914 with the title Le Tribolazioni del Reverendo Amos Barton, preceded by a preface by G. Negri. Translations of Mr Gilfil's Love Story (Il Matrimonio di Mr Gilfil) and of Janet's Repentance (Il Pentimento di Giannina), edited by P. Bellezza, were published in 1922. A translation of Adam Bede was edited by Mario Carpi and published in 1931. The first translation of Silas Marner into Italian, edited by L. Spaventa Filippi, was published in 1935. A second one, edited by T. Calandra Pedrotti, appeared in 1939. The Mill on the Floss was translated by Giacomo Debenedetti and published by Mondadori Press in 1940 with an introduction by Debenedetti himself. It was reprinted several times. The same translation was published with an introduction by Anna Luisa Zazo, again by Mondadori Press, in 1950, and it was reprinted several times. Other translations of this novel were made by V. Bianconcini and C. Brusasca. Another translation of Silas Marner was published in Milan in 1954 and in 1955 another translation of Amos Barton appeared in Florence. In 1957 Vittorio Radicati translated Romola. In 1978 a translation of The Lifted Veil (Il Velo Scostato) appeared in the book Il Cavaliere dalla Piuma Rosso Sangue. Middlemarch was translated by Mario Manzari in 1982. The same novel was translated by Michele Bottalico the following year.

These translations are difficult to find. In the section of his bibliography concerned with Italian translations of George Eliot's novels, Silvano Sabbadini notes that the only

translations of the English novelist's works available on the market are that of The Mill on the Floss by Debenedetti and the 1954 translation of Silas Marner. During research in Italian libraries I found the translations of Adam Bede by Carpi, of Silas Marner by Calandra Pedrotti, of Romola by Radicati, of The Mill on the Floss by Debenedetti, of Middlemarch by both Manzari and Bottalico. It is perhaps surprising that Eliot's most famous novels (The Mill on the Floss and Middlemarch) were translated into Italian so late.

4) Analysis of the Introductions to the Translations of the Novels

All the translations I have found are accompanied by introductions, which, with one exception (Adam Bede by Carpi), contain some interesting elements of criticism. I shall begin this section by examining Calandra Pedrotti's and Radicati's introductions together as they both considered George Eliot a Realist novelist. I shall then make comparisons between Debenedetti's and Anna Luisa Zazo's introductions to The Mill on the Floss, and between Manzari and Sabbadini's introductions to Middlemarch.

Calandra Pedrotti and Radicati's translations, respectively of Silas Marner and of Romola, were both published by UTET Press as books belonging to the series 'The great foreign writers'. They both begin their introductions with George Eliot's biography, and they both underline the important role George Henry Lewes had played not only for George Eliot as a woman, but also for George Eliot as a novelist. Both the critics accept

(as all the Italian critics did) the common subdivision of George Eliot's novels in two periods, and they both consider the first period better than the second. The early novels are considered to be works of spontaneous imagination, whereas in the late ones George Eliot focuses more on moral meditation than on artistic spontaneity. I will show in the next pages that this critical opinion was shared by all Italian critics.

Calandra Pedrotti was not original in giving his opinion about George Eliot's literary itinerary and about the difference between the early and the late novels. She repeats the same words used in 1912 by Pietro Bardi in his anthology Scrittori inglesi dell'Ottocento. [23] However, this introduction by Calandra Pedrotti is valuable because George Eliot is regarded as a Realist writer. The critic emphasises George Eliot's meticulousness and strong powers of observation as distinctive features of her literary works. The vocabulary used by the critic to examine George Eliot's works is characterised by words like 'scrupulously', 'details', 'describe', 'observe',[24] which show that Calandra Pedrotti considers George Eliot a novelist who represented life as she really saw it. Furthermore, the critic points out that the novels of George Eliot are autobiographical; he writes that the years the novelist spent in Warwickshire '...provided her with the material for her best tales and with the background of Silas Marner'.[25] Calandra Pedrotti writes that the Realist tendency in George Eliot was common throughout English novels of the

[23] P. Bardi, Scrittori Inglesi dell' Ottocento, Bari: Laterza,1912. I will deal with this book later in the chapter.
[24] T. Calandra Pedrotti, 'Introduzione'. in G.Eliot, Silas Marner. Il Tessitore di Raveloe, Ed. T. Calandra Pedrotti.Torino: Utet, 1939, p.7
[25] ibid.,p.5

Victorian age, but he does not explain what he means with this statement. The quick mention of the fact that George Eliot described ordinary events could be an explanation. The critic possibly means that like Dickens and Trollope, George Eliot was not interested in heroes and extraordinary events. If this is the case, Calandra Pedrotti makes an interesting observation which was better expressed some years later by Mario Praz, who talks of the *Eclipse of the hero in the Victorian novels*. However, Calandra Pedrotti also writes that novels like Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss are typical examples of Victorian novels because they represent tragic events. This could mean that what made George Eliot a typical Victorian novelist was the sensational, pathetic elements present in her novels, as it was in Dickens' works, for example. Also De Logu in his study emphasises the presence of sensational and melodramatic elements in George Eliot's novels.

Another aspect of George Eliot's works which Calandra Pedrotti focuses his attention on, is the peculiar mixture of Realism and moralism in his novels . The presence of moralism in George Eliot's novels has been noted by many critics. It is seen as the negative feature of the novels of the second period, as mentioned above. Calandra Pedrotti finds this moralistic attitude also in the other novels. She writes that '...this realistic writer is actually a moralist, and her characters always reflect her serene and careful meditation'.[26]

[26] ibid.,p.7

This mixture of Realism and moralism is what Calandra Pedrotti notices about Silas Marner. On the one hand, he suggests that the novel's characters are true because the reader can recognise in them his own good and bad passions. On the other hand, he points out that George Eliot gives an ethical teaching to her readers, emphasising that Silas Marner gains redemption after having experienced pains and sorrows. Mario Praz too, as we will see below, talks of ethical teaching implicitly or explicitly present in the English novelist's works. Though briefly, Calandra Pedrotti in this essay gives some interesting suggestions, which, as we have noticed, we will find in other essays.

Vittorio Radicati also considers George Eliot a realistic writer and writes that her works represent a peculiar aspect of Realism. He notes a link not only between Italian *Veristi* and French naturalistic writers, but also between the Italians and George Eliot, whose novels were full of '...that sincere, affectionate, spontaneous participation in the life of ordinary, humble, poor people'.[27] Radicati, like Calandra Pedrotti, also focuses his attention on the fact that George Eliot preferred to represent ordinary people and events rather than extraordinary ones. Radicati further suggests that in this regard George Eliot's novels are similar to the works of Italian *Veristi*. He seems to affirm that there was a link between that peculiar branch of Realism that is English Realism and Italian *Verismo*. As I will show in the next chapter, there are similarities between George Eliot and contemporary Italian novelists as far as content is concerned, whereas from a stylistic point of view Italian novelists aimed at objectivity in a way that is different from George

[27] V. Radicati, 'Introduzione', in G. Eliot, Romola, Ed. V. Radicati, Torino: Utet,1957, p.8

Eliot's use of narrative conventions. Radicati was certainly aware of this. He points out that the English novelist was true in her representation of life (and explains this attitude by linking it with the positivistic education she had received). He quotes a passage from chapter XVII of Adam Bede where Eliot declares her intention to describe events as precisely as she can, as when a witness reports the facts in a law court. He explains that the facts George Eliot was interested in were domestic events, common to the majority of human beings, and he notes that she sympathised with her humble characters. The sympathy she felt for them led to a precise description of their inner feelings and also of the sensations she felt as a narrator.

Having noted this characteristic of George Eliot's novels, Radicati suggests that the main and most important feature of her novels is not the realistic attitude but the psychological analysis, the power of representing the inner life of characters. This made George Eliot's novels modern, and similar, in a way, to Russian novels. Radicati sees a web-like structure in George Eliot's novels. He points out that actions and events concerning different characters are strictly interwoven; that in George Eliot's narrative world individuals can fulfil their own aspirations only at the disadvantage of others . In this regard, he compares Mr Tulliver with 'Ntoni, a character from one of Verga's novels. Radicati is the only critic who has explicitly drawn a comparison between George Eliot and Verga. He emphasises how basic the meditation on the moral side of situations is in George Eliot's novels, how important the principle of duty is. This moralistic element is common to all George Eliot's novels but it is explicitly emphasised in the novels belonging

to the second period. Radicati considers this a negative feature of the late novels, as did other Italian critics. As far as Romola is concerned, Radicati underlines how much the author had studied in order to represent precisely and faithfully life in Florence in 15th century. He believes that George Eliot had sacrificed the imaginative and artistic power to erudition and meditation, but he justifies this choice. He writes that George Eliot's aim was to write an historical novel; that she wanted to give a historically exact and detailed picture; and that she succeeded in doing this. It is natural that in a historical novel '...meditation is an obstacle to imagination, that erudition restricts poetry'.[28] When summarising the novel's plot, Radicati focuses his attention on Tito Melema, on his personality and on his experience. He is 'the true protagonist of the novel'.[29] Beside him there are Romola and her father, some real-life artists and politicians, and finally Girolamo Savonarola, who as 'an inflexible judge'[30] dominates everybody.

This introduction also gives some useful information about the reception of George Eliot's novels in Italy. Radicati notes that up to his times George Eliot's most popular novels in Italy were Silas Marner, The Mill on the Floss and, to a minor extent, Adam Bede. He complains that outside England even the most careful critics were not interested in George Eliot. The bibliography Radicati added to his introduction mentions a couple of English critical studies about George Eliot and the book by Negri. Radicati did not make a list of Italian translations of George Eliot's novels.

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[28] ibid.,p.14
[29] ibid.,p.16
[30] ibid

Debenedetti's essay [31] is interesting because it does not analyse George Eliot`s works by focusing on the realistic aspect, as we would have expected from a critic who has dealt with Naturalism and with Verga. Debenedetti emphasises the importance of autobiography in the first period novels, which he defines as rural novels because they are concerned with villages and small towns. According to Debenedetti, these novels can be considered the first examples of the domestic novel form (whose origins can be found in Dickens' and Thackeray's attention to childhood) because they are concerned with the family and not with a single individual. Their main feature is their autobiographical character. They describe emotions, images, scenes really experienced by the author. This led Debenedetti to accept the common critical attitude which considers the characters of George Eliot's early novels truer than the characters of the late novels. According to him this is due to the fact that the artist's inspiration when writing the late novels was no longer lively, that '...she was not provided spontaneously with narrative material, but she had to search for it'.[32] The Mill on the Floss is the masterpiece among the rural novels, and shares their basic characteristics. It is a domestic novel and it is autobiographical. However, Debenedetti points out the fact that this autobiography is not narrated either by Maggie or by Mary Ann Evans, but by George Eliot. Debenedetti admits the identification between Maggie and Mary Ann Evans, but notes also the fact that the reader knows Maggie's story through the testimony of an observer, the narrator, who does not interfere

[31] In this study I will refer to the 1957 edition of Debenedetti's translation.
[32] G. Debenedetti, 'Introduzione' in G.Eliot, Il Mulino sulla Floss, Ed. G.Debenedetti, Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori,1957,p.9

with the character's tragic destiny. In this way the English novelist created a story whose tragic end could not be avoided, because the narrator had to report it, and, at the same time, a story rich in pity and sympathy because it was an autobiographical story. To use Debenedetti's own words, The Mill on the Floss is characterised by a 'distance and at the same time an identity between George Eliot and Marian-Maggie'.[33] George Eliot knew that Maggie had to die because she was not able to be happy (and Debenedetti knows that 'to find happiness is a duty'[34] for George Eliot), however, she could not but sympathise with a character whose situation she felt so close to hers. The novel is rich in pity and this pity becomes tenderness when George Eliot narrates how much Maggie has been loved, and becomes respect for the feelings of others when George Eliot reports the tragedy of childhood, which is never understood by adults.

In drawing the reader's attention to George Eliot as a narrator who is distant both from Mary Ann and Maggie and at the same time is in sympathy with them, Debenedetti deals with the pseudonym question. He links Mary Ann Evans' decision to write under a pseudonym with the Victorian context, characterised by a 'strict and hypocritical puritanism'.[35] In this social and cultural context her novels would have been rejected by the readers and censored if they had been written under the name of Mary Ann Evans, the name of a woman who lived with a married man. Debenedetti's interpretation of the Victorian social and cultural context is typical of Italian criticism. For example, Mario

[33] ibid.,p.15
[34] ibid.,p.14
[35] ibid.,p.12

Praz defines the Victorian age as the 'age of compromise'; [36] Anna Luisa Zazo also seems to accept this interpretation. Zazo, in her introduction to The Mill on the Floss,[37] underlined the hypocrisy characterising Victorian society. Zazo too wanted to understand why Mary Ann Evans decided to use a pseudonym. Her conclusion is different from Debenedetti's. She did not think that by using the pen-name Mary Ann Evans wanted to conceal her real name, which was reason for scandal in that social context. Rather she believed that by using a male pseudonym Mary Ann Evans merely decided to follow a common fashion (the critic mentions the Brontës as examples). This interpretation is not so naive as it may seem, neither is it so different from Debenedetti's. In fact, Zazo too links the choice of the pseudonym with the necessity to create a distance between the woman and the novelist. Thanks to the employment of a male pseudonym, the novelist could interrupt the natural flow of events in the novel by means of narratorial comments, and these would not have been considered as Mary Ann Evan's own opinion's. Furthermore, the women she portrayed would not have been connected with Mary Ann Evans' life and personality. Nevertheless, the critic notes that Maggie is actually the personification of Mary Ann; Zazo points out that Maggie dies because she is not able to find happiness throughout her life, which was the basic duty of a human being, according to Mary Ann Evans. This interpretation is identical to Debenedetti's .

[36] As he wrote in his Storia della Letteratura Inglese Firenze : Sansoni,1989,p.488
[37] In this study I will refer to the 1992 edition of Debenedetti's translation preceded by Zazo's introduction.

Debenedetti's final opinion about The Mill on the Floss is absolutely positive. It is not a moralistic novel; it is not one of the novels where the moral part is dominant and makes the whole narration pedantic. However, the whole story brings with it an important message. It underlines the eternal meaning and importance of good feelings. It is a novel belonging to that age and to that literary genre characterised by the fact that 'psychology had not scattered, disjoined the soul'.[38] Debenedetti appreciates the novel because it is a domestic novel. It described a family's experience, it emphasised the relationships among its members, and dealt with good feelings. What emerges from the novel in the end is respect for feelings. Debenedetti mentions the fact that Maggie dies held by her brother. This final scene is mentioned also by Anna Luisa Zazo, though in a different way, as we will see in the analysis of her introduction to the novel.

Before analysing Zazo's introduction to The Mill on the Floss, it is worth noting that this time the critic is a woman, and that, as we will see, her interpretation of the novel can be considered feminist. It is, then, appropriate to give a brief account of the history of Italian Feminism.

The 'woman question' in Italy has always been linked with ideological issues. Women's emancipation has been discussed in relation either to the Church, or Fascism, or to conservative party politics, and to the role this party considered as appropriate for women. It was in the middle of 19th century that feminist ideas began to spread in Italy,

[38] G. Debenedetti, 'Introduzione', op. cit., p. 14

when women realised they were doing the same work of men but were being paid less, when they started to be politically active during the years of the Risorgimento. On the one hand, it is true that a connection existed between the Risorgimento and early feminism. Cristina Belgioioso is a clear example of this. She left the prince she had married when she was sixteen and used her money for political purposes. She helped Mazzini to go to Savoy, and she herself became the focal point for Italian exiles in Paris. She founded journals against the Austrian regime and she wrote articles in which she argued for broader social and educational chances for women. On the other hand and more commonly, the image of the woman promoted during the Risorgimento was that of the mother of the nation. It will only be almost a hundred years later that the women's biological and reproductive functions ceased to be considered as the only features of their role.

From a legal point of view, with the introduction of the new national Civil Code of 1856 things did not really change for women. A wife did not have economic independence from her husband, who, on the contrary, could dispose of her property. A woman who strayed from her marriage was always found guilty of adultery, whereas a man was considered guilty only if he brought his mistress into the conjugal home. Divorce was not considered at all, actually it was not introduced in Italy until 1970. The only novelty in the new Code was the introduction of civil marriage, bitterly opposed by the Church. This Code, based as it was on a patriarchal conception of woman's role within the family, remained the basis of Italian law until after the Second World War.

One of the female writers of the period between unification and the 1920s was known as Neera (pseudonym of Anna Zuccari). She did not believe in the new socialist and feminist ideas, but dealt with the emotional unhappiness of many bourgeois marriages. The other important female writers of this period were Matilde Serao and Grazia Deledda, whose attitudes towards feminism were not clear. Their works are concerned with the objective picture of the post-unification reality they lived in. Sibilla Aleramo can be considered the first Italian feminist writer. She emphasised the unbearable situation of many bourgeois marriages and claimed for equality and independence for women. She also focused on the necessity for women to create their own narrative spaces and voice.

At the beginning of the 20^{h} century women's associations began to be founded. The main concerns of Italian feminists of the time were the possibility of women being admitted to every profession and the right to vote. They demanded maternity leave, regulation of working conditions, and the closure of brothels. However, Radical, Socialist, and Catholic feminists did not have the same opinions as far as family issues, such as divorce, were concerned. During the post-unification period, the woman question was dealt with only superficially by Parliament and by public opinion. All political parties opposed female suffrage, which was obtained only in 1944. The situation did not change with the First World War. With the arrival of Fascism the women's movement disappeared. The woman's role promoted by Fascist ideology was that of the mother of the nation, and women had to accept it. It was their contribution to the new imperialistic

nationalism. The role of woman was that of mother, as the role of man was that of soldier. Women writers of the time reacted to this in two ways. Some of them considered culture and literature as socially engaged, others did not. The most important writers were Natalia Ginzburg, Elsa Morante, Anna Maria Ortese, and Anna Banti. They all reached maturity as writers during the Fascist period and their representations of reality were all different from one another. Ginzburg's works, more than all the others, represent an age which is changing. Morante's works deal with the difference between official history and the everyday small stories ignored by history. Ortese reacted against *neorealismo* and gave a metaphorical representation of the world. Banti reflected on history, on women as artists.

In recent years, with the post-war economic boom and with the intimations of revolution typical of the European and American 60s, Feminism has been reborn in Italy. Women have organised their 'consciousness-raising' groups, and demanded specific social and political changes. The first problem to be faced was that of divorce. The 1970s legislation included a divorce law, a reform of family law so that equal rights were assigned to both parents, and a national plan for nurseries. In 1977 women were granted improved rights in the workplace, and their retirement age was raised to sixty-five. In 1978 abortion was legalised, though with some limitations.

From a cultural point of view, the recent past has seen women organising their cultural space and discussing the connections between sexuality and textuality. They have put forward issues such as abortion, childcare, and legal reforms. The Centro Culturale

Virginia Woolf was founded in Rome, and women began to create their own publishing houses. The women's movement in Italy was different from the American, British, or French movements, in the sense that it was not absorbed by the establishment. It is worth noting that university courses in Women's Studies are not common in Italy, if they exist at all. Besides, Italian Feminism has not been characterised by literary and textual studies as in other Western countries. An important name in contemporary female literature is that of Dacia Maraini, who writes consciously from the woman's point of view. Writers like her, therefore, challenge women to change their situation. In the 1980s a generation of younger writers began to appear, and some of them continue to analyse the area of gender and sexual difference. Francesca Sanvitale and Fabrizia Ramondino, for instance, deal with the relationship between mothers and daughters. Others explore new topics and new forms for women's writing. In recent years writing by women has become more and more successful.

This is the cultural context in which Anna Luisa Zazo developed her feminist reading of The Mill on the Floss . Her interpretation of the novel's final scene is a good starting point for an analysis of her essay. She emphasises that in the last scene the author allowed Maggie to give her brother a sign of 'the unconscious greatness of her soul'.[39] Zazo interprets this fact as the only triumph in the life of a woman who was conditioned by a society characterised by 'mean rules of honesty and respectability',[40] by superficial

[39] A.L. Zazo, 'Introduzione', in G. Eliot Il Mulino sulla Floss, Ed A.L. Zazo, Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori,1992,p. 8
[40] ibid.

principles valuing the appearance more than the substance of things. No writer had yet pointed out that in a society dominated by men there is not a place for a woman who does not want to betray her personality and principles. This is what George Eliot emphasises when describing Maggie's personality and fate. In this social context Maggie does not change her passionate and intense nature, but always feels guilty about that. She is rarely strong enough to affirm her real personality without feeling repentance and, therefore, without accepting the codified rules. During her whole life Maggie has to give up her dreams and aspirations. To be precise, she has to give up that right to be happy (and therefore to love) which was so important for Mary Ann Evans. The most plausible explanation for the fact that Maggie always falls in love with men she will have to leave can be found, according to Zazo, in the parallelism between Mary Ann and Maggie present throughout the novel. Mary Ann loved the wrong man, according to society, but still lived with the man she loved, whereas 'Maggie's honesty is punished with death'.[41] Debenedetti too had noticed this discrepancy between Mary Ann's destiny and Maggie's. In Zazo's introduction, it is clear that she gave a feminist reading of the novel. She points out that The Mill on the Floss had never been considered a feminist novel, probably because the word Feminism seemed

> ...not to belong to Victorian age, though it is in this same epoch that women began to fight for their own emancipation. However, The Mill on

[41] ibid.,p.10

the Floss nowadays looks like one of the most coherent, severe and sharp feminist novels. [42]

According to Zazo, George Eliot's rebellion against contemporary society focused not on the social tragedies, which Zazo believes had troubled the Victorian 'compromise', but on the moral injustices. Zazo condemns the fact that the power of the industrial middle class had had a negative effect on the intensity, the truths of feelings. At this point, Zazo's feminist reading becomes similar to Debenedetti's interpretation. The two critics both emphasise the positive role which is assigned to good feelings in the novel. Zazo too gives a completely positive judgement of the novel. She considers it 'a really great work: a mature, complete novel'.[43] She concludes her essay by pointing out that The Mill on the Floss is the condemnation of a society where false values dominated to the disadvantage of the best qualities, where the latter could not be influential because their power was limited by conventional rules. The bibliography Zazo added to her introduction contains a list of the Italian translations of George Eliot's novels available up to that time. As far as criticism is concerned, she does not mention any Italian study.

Manzari's introduction to Middlemarch starts with a detailed biography, which draws attention especially to George Eliot's religious problems. Manzari describes the novelist's transition from theology to metaphysics and then to positivistic philosophy, which, as we will see, is discussed also by De Logu. After this, Manzari gives some

[42] ibid.,p.8

information about George Eliot's novels before analysing Middlemarch. What is worth noting is that Manzari emphasises how central the difficult relationship between the individual and society is in Eliot's novels. He points particularly to how the novels of the first period deal with the individual's fight in order to achieve 'moral redemption and a new integration into society',[44] and how this redemption is gained through sorrows and pains. Manzari notices a development in George Eliot's narrative from Scenes of Clerical Life, in which the critic recognises the typical faults of a beginner (narrator's interference, sentimentality, inability to analyse the characters' inner side), to Adam Bede, where the plot has become more complex. In Adam Bede there are more characters, who have a greater psychological profundity, and the social environment is carefully described and acquires a decisive function. When discussing The Mill on the Floss, which Manzari considers a complex novel analysing the relationships among individuals inside society and inside the family, he gives important information about this novel's fortune in Italy in the 20th century. He writes that this is George Eliot's most popular novel in Italy, which confirms what Radicati says in his introduction to Romola. Manzari's opinion of the novels of the second period is generally negative. What he writes about Romola is of interest. As all the other critics, he complains that this is a work of erudition rather than the creative work of an artist. Furthermore, unlike Radicati, he feels that the historical record is not good, and that there are some artificial events which makes the story implausible.

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[43] ibid.,p.11

In his analysis of Middlemarch Manzari emphasises the structural unity of the novel and the interconnection between the various plots, though George Eliot had not conceived them as parts of a whole. Thus, it seems that Manzari agrees with those critics who have spoken of Middlemarch as a novel with a web-like structure. Manzari writes that the various families stories are 'interwoven with one another and are all linked with the rural Middlemarch environment'.[45] In the representation of Middlemarch society Manzari recognises autobiographical elements. He gives also his opinion about the often discussed question of the moralistic intrusions, which he feels penalised artistic creativity. According to him, the moral basis of the novel makes a whole with the artistic conception, so that the moral basis is really the cause and the explanation of the characters' behaviour. Manzari feels that all the characters deceive themselves. They make wrong choices because they are not able to see how people and events really are, they are 'blind'.[46] Manzari clarifies this thesis with some examples. Dorothea believes that she will realise her aspirations by marrying Casaubon; Lydgate is deceived about his own abilities and about Rosamond's personality; Rosamond deceives herself about Lydgate's social status, and so on. Some of them recover from this blindness. Dorothea, for example, understands the 'intellectual mistake'[47] she made marrying Casaubon and will marry Ladislaw. Lydgate, on the other hand, realises how blind he was but will not be able to free himself from the ties

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[44] M. Manzari, 'Introduzione', in G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed.M. Manzari. Torino: Utet,1982. p.VIII. This translation of the novel was published within the series 'I Grandi Scrittori Stranieri'(The Great Foreign Writers), like T. Calandra Pedrotti and V. Radicati's translations.
[45] ibid.,p.XIII
[46] ibid.,p.XV
[47] ibid.

of marriage. This concept of Middlemarch as a novel whose plot develops from an original condition of blindness is shared by many critics; for instance, by Praz and by Marroni, who discuss it in their essays about the English novelist. Manzari draws attention to the role played by the Garths. They are not blind as all the other characters are (with the exception of Ladislaw), because they have kept the rural world values. They have not been contaminated by the middle class values. Their role is to underline those positive values that the other inhabitants of Middlemarch ignore or deprecate. This the reason why the Garths 'have not got a story, like the static rural world'.[48] Thus, according to Manzari, George Eliot considered the middle class values negative, and people belonging to that class blind; whereas the positive values were represented by the rural world. Apparently, Manzari believed that George Eliot's attitude was conservative and also pessimistic, since she condemned the contemporary social situation and regretted the past. However, Manzari did not think that the novelist's aim when writing Middlemarch was to deal with the social problems of English society during the period of the First Reform Bill. Actually, George Eliot dealt only 'superficially and ironically'[49] with political matters, whereas she was directly and deeply concerned with the individuals' relationships, which do not depend on social revolutions, but are always 'problematic, dramatic, and, most of all, actual'.[50]

Sabbadini's criticism of Middlemarch is basically different from Manzari's because Sabbadini describes the historical and social context in which Eliot lived when writing the

[48] ibid.,p.XV
[49] ibid.,p.XVI
[50] ibid.

novel, and the one constituting Middlemarch's setting. He emphasises the chronological period Middlemarch is concerned with. The novel was written during the period of the Second Reform Bill and was set during the period of the First Reform Bill. The political and social context is important, according to Sabbadini, in order to understand the meaning of the novel. His reading of it starts with a critical description of the social context in which George Eliot lived, and of the consequences of social and political events for culture and literature. When George Eliot wrote her novels she realised, like all English novelists of the period, that the idealism of the first Victorian period did not exist anymore. The central role which subjectivity had had during the Romantic period had been replaced by a positivistic scientific objectivity, which meant that the individual had to accept the system's rules. Middlemarch is the story of this disillusionment. Its characters' stories symbolise the search for a connection between their aspirations and reality, which is to say, according to Sabbadini, between their ideal world and the actual possibilities offered by reality. The problem is that in the context which George Eliot was concerned with, the balance, the integration between individual and society, was impossible to achieve. The aspiration to harmony could be gained only in a narrative sense (but, as we will see, Sabbadini realises that it was not achievable even in that respect). The experiences of the characters' develop from an original condition of innocence (which is the same as the blindness, the self-deceit Manzari talks of), characterised by the protagonists' dreams and aspirations. Afterwards, they will discover that they will not fulfil their own dreams. When the characters discover reality, they all realise the imbalance between reality and their aspirations. Dorothea, Casaubon, Lydgate, Rosamond, Ladislaw,

Farebrother, Bulstrode, etc. will all be 'disappointed'.[51] They will all understand that it is impossible to realise their dreams, to fill reality with their own subjectivity, and they will all realise how humble their position in the real world is. Everybody, that is except Mary Garth, whose original situation is different from the others', because she has already accepted her modest position in the real world. As we have seen, Manzari also emphasises the peculiar role the Garths play in the novel. The difference between Manzari's and Sabbadini's interpretations is clear. Whereas Manzari does not explain the characters' experience as being the result of the peculiar social context they live in, Sabbadini specifically links their negative experience to that social context. Sabbadini writes that with this novel dated 1871 we begin to understand the problem of the individual's alienation from society. George Eliot showed how 'The characters, the events, and the author herself vanish into the web which is interwoven above and around their actions'. [52]

Sabbadini then analyses the novel from a structural point of view. He notes the importance of the web metaphor throughout the novel, and the fact that this metaphor explains the structure of the novel. He explicitly talks of Middlemarch as a novel with a web-like structure where everything, everybody is incomplete except in relation to something or somebody else. Also the narrator's role may be explained by this metaphor. The narrator does not focus on one single character's point of view about the events, he has to follow all the possible points of view. The critic wonders what the narrator's role is

[51] S. Sabbadini, 'Introduzione', op. cit.,p.XVIII

in this infinite system of interpretation. He wonders whether the narrator can aspire to totality. According to Sabbadini, George Eliot answered these questions by employing the omniscient narrator convention. She aimed at creating an omniscient narrator who described what he saw, without transforming it, and who could see the web from all the possible perspectives. This narrator is an 'ideal and scientific observer',[53] whereas the single character cannot decipher reality because he is part of it and therefore modifies it when he observes it. In this way, by means of the omniscient narrator convention, George Eliot tried to fulfil the aspiration for harmony (which, as we have seen, cannot be fulfilled in the real world) at least in the narrative dimension. Sabbadini criticises this narrative aspiration to harmony, as any 20th century critic would have done. He explains that the narrator too cannot give an objective and impartial description of reality, because he selects his material. He chooses what to see and what to describe. 'To see means to give one's own interpretation',[54] writes, and this is what 20th century criticism says about the realistic and naturalistic aspiration for narrative impartiality. From the parable about the pier-glass at the beginning of chapter XXVII it seems clear that the author herself had realised how this aspiration for harmony was impossible to achieve.

[52] ibid.,p.XX
[53] ibid.,p.XXII
[54] ibid.,p.XXIV

5) Analysis of the Critical Studies about George Eliot

Sabbadini is the only critic who, in the bibliography he added to his introduction, discusses the Italian contributions to criticism about George Eliot. As I have already noted, he gives a list of the Italian translations of her novels, which is not complete, and of the Italian books on the English novelist, which has been a helpful guide to my research. He mentions Negri's study, a study by L. Berti entitled Considerazioni sul Realismo Morale di George Eliot,[55] published in 1935, and Mario Praz's La Crisi dell'Eroe nel Romanzo Vittoriano,[56] dated 1935, which Sabbadini considers the most important contribution to Italian criticism on George Eliot. He also includes two more recent studies: Pietro De Logu's La Narrativa di George Eliot[57] (1969), and Francesco Marroni's La Verita' Difficile[58] (1980). In my own research I also came across the following: a mention of George Eliot in the anthology of 19th century English writers by Pietro Bardi [59] (1912); the inclusion of Romola among the list of books available in bookshops contained in the volume of the periodical La Voce dated 1916; Maria Tosello's study entitled Le Fonti Italiane della Romola di George Eliot [60] (1956); a chapter about Romola in the Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Italian Association of English Studies [61]

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[55] L. Berti, Considerazioni sul Realismo Morale di George Eliot, Firenze:Sansoni,1935
[56] M. Praz, La Crisi dell' Eroe nel Romanzo Vittoriano,Firenze: Sansoni, 1935
[57] op. cit.
[58] F. Marroni, La Verita' Difficile, Bologna: Patron,1980
[59] op. cit.
[60] M. Tosello, Le Fonti Italiane della Romola di George Eliot,Torino: Utet, 1956
[61] J. Mac Rae, 'Romola', in. Atti del IV Congresso (Perugia,9-11 ottobre 1981) , Ed. Associazione Italiana di Anglistica, Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1982

(1981); and Middlemarch: il romanzo,[62] a collection of essays about George Eliot's novel (1987). I also went through some of the most important periodicals and magazines of 20th century,[63] such as Nuova Antologia, Belfagor, Otto-Novecento, Rivista di Letterature Moderne e Comparate, La Voce, Il Baretti, Rivista Europea, Il Ponte, Mondo Europeo, Rivista Fiorentina, La Critica, Società, but I did not find any articles about George Eliot. In the bibliography added to the 1960 volume of La Rivista di Letterature Moderne e Comparate I have read of the publication of the article 'L'inglese Eliot' in the periodical Il Mondo of 1957. In the volume of the same periodical dated 1980 the critical study La verità difficile: uno studio sui romanzi di George Eliot by Francesco Marroni is mentioned.

All the periodicals and magazines I have analysed are considered high-brow, as the names of some of the contributors show. La Critica, for example, was founded in 1903 by Benedetto Croce, and its subtitle declares that it is a periodical concerned with literature, history and philosophy. La Voce, founded in 1908 and directed by Giovanni Prezzolini, had among its collaborators Croce, Gentile, Emilio Cecchi (a critic who also specialised in English literature) Pietro Jahier and Clemente Rebora, all famous intellectuals. Some periodicals like Rivista Europea, Mondo Europeo, Rivista di Letterature Moderne e Comparate are clearly concerned with European literatures, as the titles themselves suggest, but the articles about English literature I have found were concerned with Milton, Blake, Coleridge, Dickens, Hardy, Lawrence, James, T. S. Eliot, and Huxley. From the information I have collected about the reception of George Eliot's works in Italy I can

[62] Middlemarch. Il Romanzo, Ed. C. Beebe Tarantelli, Napoli: Loffredo, 1987

conclude that George Eliot did not have much fortune in Italy. I believe my conclusion to be borne out by the fact that Mario Praz does not mention any Italian critical study about the English novelist in the notes and bibliography he added to his work about George Eliot; whereas Pietro De Logu mentions only Praz's essay in his study. I will now analyse some of the critical essays I have found.

Pietro Bardi in his book Scrittori inglesi dell'Ottocento anthologises some passages from English writers of the 19th century and gives some information about their life and their literary biography. Bardi was a teacher in a High School in Rome. He made some translations from English into Italian and vice versa, he wrote an English grammar. He was obviously a specialist in the study of English culture, as are all the critics I am going to deal with. These critical works are intended for a cultured audience and Pietro Bardi's anthology is no exception. It was obviously intended for readers who were at least familiar with the English language, since the anthologised passages are not translated into Italian.

As far as George Eliot is concerned, Bardi chose two passages from The Mill on the Floss (an interesting choice if we think that Debenedetti in 1940 and Radicati in 1957 will state that it was George Eliot's most popular novel in Italy). Bearing in mind that the biographical and critical note preceding the two passages is only the second critical mention of George Eliot in Italy (after Negri's study), it is interesting to note that the critic

[63] I have gone through the volumes available at the University Libraries in Naples.

emphasises George Henry Lewes' importance for George Eliot the novelist, as many of the following critics will do. In fact, Bardi writes that G.H. Lewes '...being aware of her genius, persuaded her to become a novelist.'[64] Analysing George Eliot's literary production, Pietro Bardi divides the novels into two sections, the early novels (The Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner) and the late novels (Romola, Felix Holt, Middlemarch, Daniel Deronda). He points out that whereas the first period novels are set in the rural world that was so familiar to the writer, the second period novels are erudite works, spoiled by moral and philosophic dissertations, lacking 'truth, creativity, life'.[65] As I have noted in my analysis of the introductions to the Italian translations of George Eliot's novels, this critical attitude is typical of Italian criticism on the English novelist (probably influenced by English criticism); it is also worth noting the direct influence this note by Bardi had on T. Calandra Pedrotti, as I have already pointed out. Bardi also gives some brief information about each novel. He emphasises the autobiographical element characterising The Scenes of Clerical Life, the strong power of observation of the family life (which Bardi notes is typical of Jane Austen's novels too), and a tragic and emotional inspiration (which is absent in Jane Austen's novels). He considers Adam Bede a truthful picture of English rural life of the period. He notes that The Mill on the Floss shows a great ability to analyse the human spirit (which was regarded by Radicati as the main feature of George Eliot's narrative), especially when it is troubled by the conflict between love and duty, as happens to Maggie. Bardi defines Silas

[64] P. Bardi, op. cit.,p.259
[65] ibid.,p.260

Marner as a 'short idyllic tale',[66] and these words are repeated by Calandra Pedrotti in her introduction. Bardi points out that with Romola, a work of erudition, the second period of George Eliot's production started. He believes that the second period is characterised by those negative elements we have already discussed. In this brief note there is also information about George Eliot's success in England.

Mario Praz's essay about George Eliot is the first monograph about the English novelist to be published in Italy. It is contained in Praz's critical study of the Victorian novel, La Crisi dell'Eroe nel Romanzo Vittoriano.[67] The title of the book clearly explains Praz's point of view in analysing George Eliot's production. He points out that her characters, like Thackeray's, are ordinary people and not heroes. However, unlike Thackeray, George Eliot avoids the picturesque element in her novels. In this sense Praz considers George Eliot's narrative as realistic. He maintains that the novelist carefully observed reality and described it as it really was, without creating heroes or extraordinary events. It is evident that George Eliot was influenced by Wordsworth's poetry, and in particular by the ideas he expressed in the Preface to The Lyrical Ballads. Praz underlines this connection between Wordsworth and George Eliot quoting passages from her letters and her novels where she expressed her literary aims. These aims were to tell her story without falseness, to get her readers accustomed to the tragedies of everyday life, and to widen her readers' sympathies for their fellow men. The fact that Praz draws attention to

[66] ibid.

the similarities between Wordsworth's principles and choice of characters, and George Eliot's ideas about art and her thematic choices is important. He also draws a comparison between George Eliot's concern with ordinary people and events and Dutch painting, which '...first discovered beauty in humble, everyday things in creatures plebeian and anonymous, the painting which initiated democratic art.'[68] He notes a similarity between the English novelist and Tolstoy, who focused his attention on the anonymous crowd, on the facts history does not report. To support this, Praz quotes the concluding passage of Middlemarch.

According to Praz, Wordsworth influenced George Eliot also as far as the concept of duty was concerned. The idea of duty was central in the English novelist's moral world and it is significant that she chose some verses from the Ode to Duty as the epigraph of chapter LXXX of Middlemarch. However, Praz notes also that it was from the rural world where she was brought up that George Eliot derived her idea of duty. In this world she realised the importance of natural laws, their eternal repetition, the fact that everything has its precise place in the system and the importance of the old institutions. This led to her conservative attitude. It is easy to recognise the connection between this respect for natural laws and the positivistic ideas about man's role in the world, according to which the individual belongs to a system he cannot change. Praz underlines the fact that in spite of these doctrines, the atmosphere George Eliot creates in her novels is not rigid and nor

[67] M. Praz, op. cit. This study has been translated into English by Angus Davidson with the title The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, London: Oxford University Press,1956. From now on I will refer to this edition of Praz's study.

are her characters. This is thanks to the central role memories of childhood played in her creative process (and here Praz is thinking particularly of the first part of The Mill on the Floss).

It is interesting that Praz highlights the fact that in her novels George Eliot wants to communicate an ethical teaching. She wants to show how human beings achieve redemption after facing up to difficult moments and experiencing sorrow and pain. Though Praz points out that the foundation of this ethical message is optimistic, since it suggests that men can improve their condition, he notes also that George Eliot's novels actually conveys a pessimistic message. They focus on man's inability to dominate external circumstances, on the weakness of human will. The comparison Praz draws between George Eliot and Leopardi in this regard is worth noting. Praz points out that the English novelist had realised nature's indifferent attitude towards men and the importance of human solidarity, which is reminiscent of the ideas Leopardi expressed in La Ginestra.

To sum up Praz's critique of George Eliot: the English novelist drew attention to common events and people, described them truly and showed how these ordinary events also had a deep meaning. This led her to the discovery and observation of man's inner world, rich in conflicts and contradictions. Praz underlines the fact that George Eliot often dealt with unhappy matrimonial situations, as Trollope also did. George Eliot's narrative testifies to the passage from the realistic novel to the novel offering an insight into

[68] M. Praz, op. cit., p. 326

characters' personality, from the almost scientific observation of the everyday world, based on Comte's ideas but also on Wordsworth's, to James and Proust's narrative.

Praz analyses George Eliot's literary production from a technical point of view. He underlines the presence of symbolical images in her novels and gives some examples of them. He points out the presence of the water images throughout her novels, the gold images in Silas Marner, the roulette image in Daniel Deronda and so on. The analysis of these images led Praz to the conclusion that in George Eliot's novels there is little creativity. She certainly was better at focusing on the moral aspect rather than on the artistic one. For Praz, her works are characterised by a serenity which is prosaic, not poetic. He notes also how limited George Eliot's inventive ability was. In her novels she deals with a basic set of events, which she repeats according to the different situations. Adoption, for example, occurs both in Romola and Silas Marner; the marriage between Gwendolen and Grandcourt, who has already got a concubine, recalls Romola's marriage with Tito, who has a relationship with Tessa, and so on. Furthermore, George Eliot used certain melodramatic and sensational devices typical of Victorian narrative, but inappropriate to her novels. Here, Praz underlines the function of the recognition-scene, which he considers the 'deus ex machina'[69] of Victorian narrative, and points out its presence in George Eliot's novels. These are features George Eliot shared with Dickens; but Praz notes that these devices are negative features of George Eliot's narrative.

[69] ibid..p.369

The Italian Association of English Studies also dealt with the Victorian age during its fourth congress, focusing on the interaction between humanistic and natural sciences typical of the period. It is worth noting that George Eliot is one of the Victorian writers who were discussed during this congress. Actually, the essay about her [70] is the work of an English critic, John McRae, who now teaches at the University of Naples. Therefore, his essay, which is about Romola, does not add any information to our analysis of Italian criticism about George Eliot.

Pietro De Logu's study is concerned with a detailed analysis of all George Eliot's novels. He examines them both from a thematic and from a technical point of view. He gives a general view of his critical attitude towards George Eliot in the first chapter of his study, where he deals with the novelist's intellectual biography and with what he considers the main features of her novels. This chapter gives us information about the kind of reading George Eliot did, and about the fact that the novelist had learned Italian with the help of a Mr Brezzi. There is also information about the texts which influenced her religious ideas and about her religious conflict, which the critic summarises as a journey from theology to metaphysics and finally to positivism.[71] De Logu also notes the importance of positivistic ideas in George Eliot's intellectual world. From Positivism George Eliot derived

[70] J. Mac Rae, 'Romola', op. cit.
[71] Also Manzari in his introduction to Middlemarch wrote about this journey when dealing with George Eliot's religious conflicts.

> ...the principles her aesthetic theories are based upon, the representation of life, the understanding of moral and social events; in a word the essence of her narrative world. [72]

De Logu was aware of the fact that in her novels George Eliot deals with the analysis of human condition, which is why she needed the aid of the realistic method typical of Positivism. At the same time, the critic realised that morality played a central role in George Eliot's narrative. Thus, De Logu suggests that the problem George Eliot had to solve was the contradiction between realism and moralism. She had to reconcile her idea that the artist's function was to dignify ordinary life, to awaken the reader's moral sensitivity, to promote human sympathy with her intention to give a true picture of human life. This lies behind his interpretation of the function of the omniscient narrator convention fulfilled in George Eliot's novels. By using this technical device, George Eliot could interfere whenever she wanted in the course of the narration in order to make her ideas about the situation clear and to fulfil her aim as an artist. The consequence, De Logu notes, is an imbalance between objectivity and subjectivity, between dramatic method and omniscient technique. In his analysis of the novels, De Logu points out that the characters' representations are better when they are based upon dialogue and action, and not upon the narrator's comments. It is worth emphasising that De Logu supports his opinion with examples from the novels. We must not forget that his study is not an introduction to a novel, but is a long and detailed monograph about the English novelist.

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[72] P. De Logu., op. cit., p.25

As far as content is concerned, De Logu underlines the fact that George Eliot dealt with ordinary people and events, explicitly following Praz's criticism. He also points out that the English novelist's characters experience a conflict between the ideal world their imagination had created and the real world. Therefore, he focuses his attention on the fact that George Eliot's characters fail because the real world destroys their aspirations. However, De Logu does not forget that in the representation of this conflict, morality, or what Praz calls 'ethical teaching', plays an important role. By showing her characters undergoing conflicts, George Eliot underlines the fact that these characters

> ...can achieve moral maturity through the painful, dramatic lesson given by everyday experience; but they must be able to limit their desires, to acquire an inner discipline, to look at the world from an objective distance, bearing in mind the power of those forces man cannot control.[73]

The themes George Eliot was concerned with were obviously connected with this context. De Logu underlines the importance of the representation of the conflict between egoism and altruism, between resignation and action, and between alienation and integration of the individual into society. He also emphasises the importance of the relation between past and present in George Eliot's world. Her characters must all get used to the fact that 'the

[73] ibid.,p.28

past continues in the present';[74] if they underestimate the central role the past has in their lives they inevitably fail.

It is clear that De Logu has a deep understanding of the essence of George Eliot's narrative. This emerges also from the technical analysis he made of her novels. He points out that the way George Eliot structured her novels mirrored the interwoven structure of life, the relations among individuals, and the causes and effects influencing human life. Like Praz, De Logu realises the importance of certain images in the novels and the symbolic meaning they have. He points out that these images are not abstract but are based on scientific observation of the natural world. Furthermore, he draws attention to the presence of melodramatic and sensational devices in George Eliot's novels. which he obviously considers negative elements.

The final chapter of De Logu's book aims at analysing the various critiques of George Eliot. The critic does not mention any Italian studies except Praz's essay, which he explicitly quotes throughout the book.

The book Middlemarch.Il Romanzo edited by Carol Beebe Tarantelli, who teaches at the University of Rome, is made up of a series of essays (both by English and Italian critics) about Middlemarch, I will discuss two of the Italian essays, one by Francesco Marroni, from the University of Pescara and another by Michele Bottalico from the

[74] ibid.,p.30

University of Bari. The reason why I have chosen these two essays is that we have already encountered these two critics during our discussion. Marroni is the author of a study on George Eliot entitled La verità difficile [75] and the analysis of his essay on Middlemarch will help us to understand his critical attitude, while to infer it from his book would take too much space. Bottalico is the author of a translation of Middlemarch into Italian published in 1983. The analysis of his essay about the novel will show us the problems he encountered during his work, and also his opinion of the novel.

In his essay 'Middlemarch e le Metafore dell'Eccesso' Marroni gives his interpretation of Middlemarch through the analysis of those characters he considered central to the novel, Dorothea and Lydgate. Through the definition of these characters' personalities he gives an interesting reading of the central themes of the novel. He points out the ambiguity of the parallelism created in the Prelude between Dorothea and St. Theresa. It is obvious that Dorothea will not be able to do what the Spanish Saint had done because the context of her life is too different from the context in which St. Theresa was able to fight for an important but ideal cause. The historical and social context in which Dorothea lives is characterised, as Marroni notes, by 'dim lights and tangled circumstances'.[76] Dorothea is not able to realise how inappropriate to this context her aspirations are. Her experience, as George Eliot describes it, begins in an original condition of innocence. Therefore, she ardently dedicates herself to her transcendental aspirations. However, Marroni points out that these religious aspirations of Dorothea's are

[75] F. Marroni,op. cit.

actually connected with her desire to make something important in her life and this is another ambiguity in Dorothea's ambitions. The critic notes that at the beginning of the novel the narrator says that Dorothea has 'the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible ... in a paragraph of to-day's newspaper'.[77] This quotation is a confirmation of the imbalance between Dorothea's aspirations and the actual context she belongs in. To sum up, Marroni's main assumption in his interpretation of Dorothea (and of the whole novel, as we will see) is that Dorothea is an outsider in the society where she lives. There is a 'spatial and temporal imbalance'[78] between the heroine and society which will lead her to a series of mistakes, most of all to her wrong matrimonial choice. She is blind as far as her observation of reality is concerned. This critical interpretation is similar to Manzari's; both Marroni and Manzari use the blindness metaphor to explain the character's attitude towards reality. Dorothea is not able to decipher the real world empirically and objectively; she regards it as '...a system of signs which have a certain value because they are linked to a superior, transcendental meaning'.[79] Marroni considers Dorothea's attitude towards reality medieval. By this he means that, according to the main feature of medieval culture, Dorothea tends to find in the real signs a meaning different from the one they actually have. That is why she marries Casaubon. She thinks he has qualities which in reality he does not have. The critic emphasises also the fact that her plan about the construction of the cottages for the labourers is not connected with the social desire to help them. She does not decipher their situation from a social point of view, but only from

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[76] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, New York: Bantam Books.1992, p.1
[77] ibid.
[78] F. Marroni, 'Middlemarch e le Metafore dell'Eccesso', in Middlemarch: il Romanzo, op. cit., p.15

a mystical-theoretical perspective. Marroni points out that Dorothea is unable to give a political interpretation of reality.

Lydgate's original condition too is characterised by innocence, by a strong belief in the possible fulfilment of his aspirations, which are connected with his job. Lydgate wants to find the hidden, deep structure of things, which means, according to Marroni, that he wants to overcome chaos and to achieve order. His mistake is to isolate himself in his researches, without caring for everyday events. That is why his attitude towards reality is characterised, as is Dorothea's, by blindness. That is why he cannot decipher properly the signs Rosamond sends to him. Like Dorothea he is not able to decipher reality as it is; he does not realise that his aspirations will be influenced by the external circumstances, because everyone's inward being is determined by what is external to him. As Dorothea is not able to understand reality from a political perspective, so he can not establish a morally meaningful relation with society.

This political inability of the two characters is connected with the political attitude characterising the whole novel. Marroni noticed that the historical events, and precisely the events characterising the period of the First Reform Bill are never analysed in Middlemarch. They are just background elements which do not play a major role in the narrative structure. Marroni points out that the characters observe the historical events from a distance without realising their deep meaning. They cannot go beyond an ethical

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[79] ibid.,p.16

interpretation of them. Marroni explains this fact by reference to the conservative attitude George Eliot had, as a member of the dominating class. We have seen that Manzari too has talked of the English novelist's conservatism, but then he has accepted the absence of historical allusions in Middlemarch as a positive element. Marroni, instead, notes also that George Eliot wrote her novels in a period when the individual (and the writer) started to experience the continual transformation of society, the absence of certainties. This is the origin of the crisis George Eliot went through, the crisis which is the basis of the political attitude expressed in Middlemarch. In conclusion, Marroni analyses the final message of the novel, summarised by the statement '..every limit is a beginning as well as an ending'.[80] By this statement George Eliot meant that we cannot give a unique interpretation of reality, because infinite interpretations are possible. Therefore, speaking in narrative terms, the novelist affirmed the contradictory nature of every conclusion. That is why, on the one hand, Middlemarch's conclusion is concerned with the happy life of Mary Garth and Fred Vincy. On the other hand, George Eliot used the river metaphor, which symbolises an uncontrolled force, to underline that for her society and novel did not have a centre.

The aim of Bottalico's essay is to underline the difficulties the critic encountered when he translated Middlemarch. He intends to justify some of his choices, which were all made in accordance with the opinion that a translator must interpret the text coherently

[80] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op. cit., p.760

and must find a balance between the two different cultural contexts he deals with, being aware that the translation will anyway give life to 'a new language'.[81]

Bottalico firstly explains the reason why he did not translate the words Prelude and Finale with the same musical terms the Italian language possesses, but with Proemio and Epilogo (Proem and Epilogue). This choice is linked with his idea of Middlemarch as an epic poem, though a modern one, where on the one hand the past has a central role in deciphering the present, but, on the other hand, the myth of St.Theresa becomes powerless against the impact on the present situation. Bottalico echoes what Sabbadini and Marroni said about the difficult relation between individual and society. He underlines that it was impossible to translate some key-words of Middlemarch with a single Italian word. He had to use different synonyms for the same concept, according to the different contexts George Eliot dealt with. The examples with which he explains his choices are a useful indication of his interpretation of the novel. In fact, he focuses his attention on three key-words: *inward, womanhood, web.*

The fact that Bottalico notes the frequent use of the term *inward* means that he has realised the fact that a central theme of the novel is the discrepancy between the characters' aspirations and the mediocrity of the real world. George Eliot often repeated the word *inward* in order to underline the inner nature of the characters' aspirations, which will be destroyed by the contact with the external world. Bottalico points out that

[81] M. Bottalico, 'Tradurre Middlemarch', in Middlemarch.Il Romanzo, op. cit..p.42

he did not use a single word throughout the text to translate this concept. He has translated it with 'intimo' or 'interiore', which suggest the inner, intimate nature of the term they refer to; or he adopted the expressions ' tra se'(within oneself), or ' nel suo animo' (in one's own soul), which give the idea of an inner dialogue within oneself. In chapter XXXVII, for example, Bottalico has translated the sentence '... and spent much inward discourse in justifying the dislike' [82] as '... e si sforzava di trovarne delle giustificazioni', [83] which literally means '... and struggled to find some justifications for it'. As we can see, the translator has chosen not to translate the word *inward*, the Italian verb *sforzarsi* already indicating an inward activity. In the same chapter the expression 'with a dumb inward cry' [84] is translated as 'con un muto grido interiore', [85] where *interiore* is the literary translation of *inward*. The same happens in chapter XLII where the expression 'this inward drama' [86] is translated as 'questo dramma interiore'.[87]

Bottalico felt that by the frequent use of the word *womanhood* George Eliot focused the reader's attention on the woman's role in pre-Victorian society. As we have seen, only one critic, Anna Luisa Zazo (a woman) has given a feminist reading of a novel by George Eliot. It is, therefore, interesting that Bottalico notes George Eliot's concern with the condition of women. Also in this case, he found it was impossible to give a single translation for the word. In the Prelude, for instance, in the passage concerned with the

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[82] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op. cit., p. 327
[83] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. S. Sabbadini, Arnoldo Mondadori: Milano, 1996, p. 371
[84] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op. cit., p. 341
[85] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. S. Sabbadini, op. cit., p. 386
[86] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op. cit., p.382
[87] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. S. Sabbadini, op. cit., p. 430

later-born Theresas, he has translated the phrase 'the common yearning of womanhood'[88] as 'le comuni aspettative legate alla condizione di donna',[89] which literally means 'the common expectations connected with the woman condition'. In this case, the translator has translated the term *womanhood* by underlining not only the peculiar feminine nature, but also the restrictions imposed on women's role. In Chapter XII, in the passage about Mary Garth's physical appearance, he decided to translate the phrase 'advancing womanhood had tempered her plainness' [90] as 'il passare degli anni aveva attenuato la sua bruttezza',[91] which literally means 'the passing of the years had tempered her plainness'. Here, as we see, Bottalico has omitted the term *womanhood*. He has conveyed its meaning by linking it with the concept of the passing of time. He has translated the expression 'generous womanhood',[92] at the end of the epigraph at the beginning of chapter XLIII, as 'una generosa femminilita'.[93] Thus, he has translated the term *womanhood*, this time, with *femminilita'*, which is semantically a very rich term, indicating the peculiarity of woman's nature, both externally and internally, according to the context.

The fact that Bottalico considers *web* a key-word in Middlemarch obviously means that he is aware of the web-like structure of the novel, and of the fact that the web metaphor describes how interconnected social and personal relations are. He has translated this term in different ways throughout the novel. In chapter XXXVI, for

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[88] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op. cit., p.1
[89] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. S. Sabbadini, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore: Milano,1996,p.4
[90] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op.cit., p.102
[91] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed.S. Sabbadini,op.cit.,p.116
[92] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op. cit.,p.391
[93] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed.S. Sabbadini, op. cit.,p.443

instance, the phrase ' Young love-making - that gossamer web!' [94] is translated with ' L'amore dei giovani - che sottilisima ragnatela!',[95] where the term *web* is literally translated. In chapter XV the sentence 'Living bodies...must be regarded as consisting of certain primary webs or tissues'[96] is translated as 'I corpi viventi...vanno considerati come formati da certe membrane o tessuti primari',[97] where the term *web* is translated as a synonym of tissue. The same happens in the Finale, where the sentence 'The fragment of a life, however typical, is not the sample of an even web'[98] is translated as 'Il frammento di una vita, per quanto tipico esso sia, non e' il campione di un tessuto uniforme'.[99] Here, the term *web* is translated as *tessuto*, whose literal meaning is 'tissue'.

Bottalico writes that the translator must be able to understand what the author's intentions were when the author wrote the novel, otherwise, the reader will have an incomplete idea of it. He exemplifies this concept by emphasising the fact that one of George Eliot's aims when she wrote Middlemarch was to underline the transformations rural society underwent following the First Reform Bill and leading to the new industrial society of the Second Reform Bill. Like Sabbadini, Bottalico thought that Middlemarch could be read as a text dealing with the transformations of society George Eliot had observed. It is not a case, according to these two critics, that these transformations had happened in the years between the First Reform Bill and the Second Reform Bill, which

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[94] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op. cit.,p.314
[95] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. S. Sabbadini, op. cit.,p.357
[96] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op. cit.,p. 134
[97] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. S. Sabbadini, op. cit.p.153
[98] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed.M. Drabble, op.cit.,p.760
[99] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. S. Sabbadini, op. cit.,p.853

are respectively the period when Middlemarch is set and the period when George Eliot wrote the novel. Bottalico quotes as an example of Eliot's focus on social transformations when writing this passage in chapter X:

> Poor Mr. Casaubon had imagined that his long studious bachelorhood had stored up for him a compound interest of enjoyment, and that large drafts on his affections would not fail to be honoured.[100]

Bottalico points out that a good translation of the novel had to render the economic terms used metaphorically in association with the character of Casaubon. His translation is:

> Il povero Mr Casaubon si era immaginato che il suo lungo celibato di studioso avesse accumulato in suo favore un interesse composto di godimento, e che non si sarebbe mancato di pagargli le grosse tratte spiccate dal suo affetto.[101]

As we see, he has literally translated the expressions ' a compound interest of enjoyment' ('un interesse composto di godimento'), 'large drafts' ('le grosse tratte'), and he has translated the phrase 'would not fail to be honoured' as 'non si sarebbe mancato di pagargli', which literally means 'would not fail to pay to him'.

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[100] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op. cit.,p.76

Bottalico then underlines the difficulty which a translator of a novel from English into Italian would encounter when translating the pronoun 'you'. Whereas the English language possesses only this pronoun with which to address people directly, the Italian language possesses three: *tu, voi, lei*, which are differently used according to context. Bottalico, therefore, when translating Middlemarch, had to decide which Italian pronoun to use according to the different situations and to the different characters. He used the pronoun *voi*, which is not formal like *lei*, but also not informal like *tu*, because he notes that the relations among individuals in a provincial environment such as the one represented in the novel were confidential, but still formal. However, he chose the pronoun *tu* in more familiar dialogues. Therefore, in chapter XLII, for example, the translator uses the pronoun *voi* for the dialogues between Casaubon and Lydgate, and the pronoun *tu* for the dialogues between Casaubon and Dorothea.

I can conclude by saying that the reception of George Eliot's works in Italy in the second half of the 19th century was very limited. However, this fact is not surprising if we bear in mind the peculiarity of the Italian historical context of the time, and the characteristics of the Italian cultural dimension developed in that context. It was at the beginning of the 20th century that George Eliot's novels began to be translated into Italian, and that the first critical essays began to appear as introductions to the translations. The first critical study conceived as a monographic essay was published in 1935. After this other critical essays were published, all dealing either with the whole of George Eliot's

[101] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. S. Sabbadini, op. cit., p.87

production, or with specific aspects of it. Therefore, we can say that in the 20th century, due to the *europeanisation* Italian intellectuals were trying to achieve, the circulation of George Eliot's novels in Italy has started to spread, and that Italian critics concerned with English literature began to show interest in her works.

II. George Eliot and Giovanni Verga: the English and Italian Approach to Realism

In the previous chapter I have often mentioned George Eliot in relation with Realism and Naturalism, and with Giovanni Verga, the major exponent of Italian Verismo.[1] In this chapter I am going to explain which aspects of the two writers' art can be considered realistic, or naturalistic,[2] and to show whether there are some similarities in their individual approach to these literary tendencies. Actually, I think that each of them gave a peculiar interpretation of Realism and Naturalism according to the peculiar social and cultural context each of them lived in, which was obviously different from the French one. I would like to underline that this discussion is not aimed at giving a full account of George Eliot and Giovanni Verga's art; instead, I will examine those aspects of their art which are relevant in order to draw a comparison between the two. I will first of all briefly explain what is meant by Realism and Naturalism, and after that I will draw a comparison between the two authors' interpretation of them.

[1] This is the term used to describe the Italian development in the second half of 19th century of the new literary taste aimed at an objective representation of reality.
[2] I will explain below what critics mean with the term Realism and what with the term Naturalism, and which one of the two terms is more appropriate when discussing George Eliot's and Verga's works.

1) A Brief Excursus on Realism and Naturalism in Literature

A discussion aimed at clarifying the meaning of the terms Realism and Naturalism and their usage in the English and Italian literature of the second half of the 19th century is bound to examine the French developments of the new literary taste. The term Realism is commonly used to refer to Balzac and Flaubert's literature; whereas the term Naturalism is associated with the ideas and works of later intellectuals, especially of Zola. In fact, Balzac and Flaubert did not develop a literary theory which explained the features and aims of the new tendency. It was Hippolite Taine who provided the theoretical criteria for the description of the new movement and the name Naturalism to describe it. This is not the only critical explanation of the two terms; some critics use the term Realism to refer to every artistic work aiming at an impartial representation of reality, and the term Naturalism to refer to the literary works appearing in the second half of 19th century. Other critics use the two terms interchangeably. In any case, the term Realism has a broader meaning than Naturalism; the former indicating the new artistic tendency characterised by the will to provide the reader with an objective representation of reality, the latter being associated with the method French intellectuals adopted in order to achieve this aim. As Hippolite Taine pointed out in an essay published in 1858 in the Journal des Debats, the features of the naturalistic approach to literature were the belief in scientific determinism, the courage to deal with sordid subjects, and, therefore, the abandonment of ideal topics. An important document useful for an understanding of the

movement is the preface to the novel Germinie Lacerteux by the brothers Goncourt. It is a declaration of the naturalistic beliefs which has a certain importance, since it was written by two novelists who considered themselves Naturalists. In the preface they warned the readers that they would find the novel different from the ones they were used to reading. They pointed out that Germinie Lacerteux was going to be a true novel, that it would deal with low topics, and they defined it as a clinical study of love. Thus, the emphasis on the main features of Naturalism was laid. Zola and the other Naturalists will be less general and more categorical on certain matters, especially on the relation between literature and science, but the Goncourts' preface clearly stated the main principles of Naturalism. It was the Naturalists' intention to provide their readers with a faithful and objective description of a slice of life (tranche de vie). They talked of a scientific approach to literature; Zola put forward the idea of the novelist as a scientist analysing data in his laboratory. The science taken as example was medicine; in fact, Claude Bernard's Introduction a' l'etude de la medicine experimentale (1865) had been the basis for Zola's theory of the experimental novel. In order to be objective the description of a slice of life did not have to stem from any preconceived ideas, it did not have to be based on prejudices, but on actual experience. For the Naturalists the reliance on documentation and observation, to observed facts was important. In terms of content, the Naturalists believed that, in order to be truthful, an account of reality must not deal with those topics which were not considered conventional literary subjects. In other words, they did not think the novelist's task was to please and amuse their readers with beautiful pictures of the fashionable world, concerned only with its positive elements. The novelists had rather

to deal with low subjects, to show their readers the ugly side of reality. We must not forget the link between the establishment of the naturalistic school and the will to denounce and protest against the negative aspects of contemporary society.

The other basic concept of Naturalism was the belief that life was influenced by physiological laws and by the environment. We can mention as an example clarifying his concept the focus Zola lay on the twin forces of heredity and environment in his cycle Rougon-Macquart. This revolution in literary taste naturally implied also an experimentation as far as the narrative techniques were concerned; these had to be changed according to the objective representation of reality. This meant that the narrator must not intrude in the course of the narration; the author had to withdraw leaving the characters to act out their destinies without any comment. The intention was to eliminate as much as possible any barriers between the reader and the narration. In few words, they shifted from the panoramic to the dramatic narrative method. This was the situation in France, and as it was it influenced the European literature of the time, but one cannot fail to notice that in each country the response to the new literary taste was different according to the different cultural and social situations.

If we move to consider the English literature of the period we notice a general tendency towards truth of observation and portrayal of commonplace events, settings and characters, which can be linked to the new realistic taste. But it is not to be found the emphasis laid by French Naturalists on the scientific detachment as one of the criteria for

achieving an objective representation of reality, which meant, in terms of narrative techniques, that English novelists allowed authorial interferences in the course of the narration. The Victorian literature was characterised by the belief that art offers an insight into the transcendental dimension of reality. In other words, English Realism was based on ideas of moral sympathy, which means that from a technical point of view the narrator is allowed to intrude in the course of the narration to give moral advices, as it happens in George Eliot's novels. I think it is therefore more appropriate to use the term Realism, rather than Naturalism, in the following discussion about George Eliot's involvement with the new literary taste.

The Italian literary response to the new tendency was also different from the French one. The Italian intellectuals of the time accepted the new criteria of objective representation of reality, of the depiction of commonplace events and characters, but they were not interested in the scientific principles proclaimed by French Naturalists. The Italian approach to the new taste was characterised by the experimentation of new technical devices novelists could use in order to achieve a faithful representation of reality and by a concern with the life of people belonging to the lowest social strata . In this case also I will use the term Realism rather than Naturalism, unless I use the word Verismo, which was created by the Italian intellectuals themselves to refer to their artistic experience.

In this discussion I will point out those aspects of George Eliot and Giovanni Verga's art which can be considered realistic, and I will analyse the similarities and differences in their approach to the new literary tendency.

2) George Eliot and Giovanni Verga's Declarations of Realism

Both George Eliot and Giovanni Verga have left us some important testimonies of their theoretical ideas about art and how a work of art should be conceived. These will help us to understand what aim they wanted to achieve when they wrote their novels, and to what extent we can talk of them as realist writers.

In chapter XVII of Adam Bede George Eliot makes a profession of Realism; she writes

> ...my strongest effort is to avoid any such arbitrary picture, and to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness - box narrating my experience on oath. [3]

[3] G. Eliot, Adam Bede, Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1903, vol. I, pp. 265-6

It is obvious from this statement that George Eliot's aim as a novelist was to give a faithful picture of life. After reading this passage one expects her novels to represent life as it is, the images of the mirror and of the witness placed on oath being explicit and, what is more, typical of realistic literature. Later in the same chapter of Adam Bede, she writes that she is narrating a 'simple story',[4] and that she does not want to 'make seem things better than they were'.[5] She shows admiration for Dutch paintings because they faithfully represent

> ...a monotonous homely existence, which has been the faith of so many more among my fellow mortals than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world - stirring actions.[6]

This says a lot about the subjects of her novels; she dealt with everyday life and with ordinary people without trying to make them more interesting than they were. About the Reverend Amos Barton she writes that he was

> ...in no respect an ideal or exceptional character...a man who was very far from remarkable; a man whose virtues were not heroic, and who had no

[4] ibid., p.267
[5] ibid.
[6] ibid., p.268

> undetected crime within his breast; who had not the slightest mystery hanging about him, but was palpably and unmistakably common place...[7]

Thus, George Eliot wanted her reader to become accustomed with commonplace events and characters; in her novels she wanted

> ...to show the gradual action of ordinary causes rather than exceptional, and to show this in some directions which have not been from time immemorial the beaten path. [8]

In The Natural History of German Life[9] George Eliot complains about the lack of a truthful representation of ordinary life in English literature, about the fact that peasants were in the best cases placed in the foreground of the pictures and were depicted in rather and idyllic way. She demands a truthful representation of them based on actual acquaintance. George Henry Lewes in his On Realism in Art accuses painters of falseness when representing peasants; they were never portrayed 'old and dirty' [10] as they were, but always with 'regular features and irreproachable linen'.[11] He states that the forms of ordinary life were misrepresented, and this was an offence; if an artist wanted to paint

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[7] G. Eliot, 'The Sad Fortunes of Reverend Amos Barton', in G. Eliot, Scenes of Clerical Life, Ed. D. Lodge, London: Penguin Books, 1985. p. 80

[8] G. Eliot, 'Letter to John Blackwood, 24 July 1871', in The George Eliot Letters, Ed. G.S. Haight. vol. V, London: Oxford University Press, 1956. p. 168

[9] G. Eliot, 'The Natural History of German Life', in Essays of George Eliot, Ed. T. Pinney, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963

[10] G.H. Lewes, 'On Realism in Art', in Realism, Ed. L.R. Furst, London & New York: Longman, 1992, p. 34

peasants he had to paint them as they were, and if a novelist made them speak, he had to make them speak in the idiom of their class.

The beginning of the novella L'Amante di Gramigna gives a clear idea of Verga's aims as a writer. He describes his novel as a 'human document',[12] he maintains that he is going to narrate the fact as it really happened, so that the reader will not find it vitiated by the authorial filter. He writes that

> The simple human fact will always provide food for thought; it will always be effective because it has really happened, because the tears narrated are true, the fevers and the sensations have really been felt...[13]

Also in his preface to I Malavoglia [14] Verga points out that the novel is a 'sincere and dispassionate study'.[15] He furthermore gives some thematical indications; he explains that it is concerned with the 'most modest and material'[16] context. He writes that the mechanism of the passions

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[11] ibid.
[12] G. Verga, 'L'Amante di Gramigna', in G. Verga, Tutte le Novelle, Ed. C. Riccardi, Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore,1991, p.191. The Italian original is: 'documento umano'
[13] ibid. The Italian original is: 'Il semplice fatto umano farà pensare sempre; avrà sempre l' efficacia dell'essere stato, delle lagrime vere, delle febbri e delle sensazioni che sono passate per la carne...'
[14] This novel has been translated into English with the title The House by the Medlar Tree
[15] G. Verga, I Malavoglia, Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1991. p. 3. The Italian original is: 'lo studio sincero e spassionato'
[16] ibid. The Italian original is: 'piu' modeste e materiali'

> ...in the lowest spheres of society is less complicated, and it is possible to observe it with greatest precision. It will only be necessary to leave the picture its genuine colours, and its simple drawing.[17]

He maintains that

> In order to have an exact artistic reproduction of that slice of reality, it is necessary to follow scrupulously the rules of the analysis; it is necessary to be sincere in order to show the truth, since the form is so inherent in the subject, as each part of the subject itself is necessary for the explanation of the general topic.[18]

Certainly, there are similarities between these declarations of Verga and the ones of George Eliot I have quoted beforehand. Verga too aimed at a faithful, objective representation of life; he used the terms *sincere, dispassionate, precise* and the image of the observer to define the novelist, while George Eliot used the mirror and the witness images. In his preface Verga also gives important hints about his subject choice. When we read his expression *simple drawing* we cannot help thinking of the *simple story* George Eliot wanted to write with Adam Bede; when he writes that he wants to keep the genuine

[17] ibid. The Italian original is: '...in quelle basse sfere e' meno complicato, e potra' quindi osservarsi con maggior precisione. Basta lasciare al quadro le sue tinte schiette e tranquille, e il suo disegno semplice.'
[18] ibid.,p.4. The Italian original is: 'Perche' la riproduzione artistica di cotesti quadri sia esatta, bisogna seguire scrupolosamente le norme di questa analisi; essere sinceri per dimostrare la verita', giacche' la forma e' cosi' inerente al soggetto, quanto ogni parte del soggetto stesso e' necessaria alla spiegazione dell' argomento generale.'

colours of the world he is going to represent, he seems to say that he is not going to make it better than it is, that he does not want to idealise the representation of these humble, ordinary people. After starting his career with novels set in the bourgeois milieu of Northern Italy, Verga chose as the setting of his novels the world of ordinary Sicilian people leading their normal everyday life, a world he was familiar with since he was born and brought up in Sicily. One of the main differences between Italian Verismo and French Naturalism is the fact that the latter dealt mainly with an urban environment and with those social classes related to the contemporary economic development (from the working class to the middle class), whereas the former was usually concerned [19] with a rural and provincial milieu, and with peasants, which were the greatest part of the Italian population. It is clear that this difference is linked to the peculiar economic and social situation of 19th century Italy, where, on the one hand, the middle class was still weak, and had not entirely developed its features as the new emerging social class, and, on the other hand, the rural world was a widespread social reality. Actually, Verga's novelle and the novels I Malavoglia and Mastro Don Gesualdo are set in Sicily and deal with ordinary people leading rural lives; in this regard, it is relevant to point out that he did not manage to write three novels set in a higher social context, as he had planned to do. Clearly, when he tried to deal again with the fashionable world, he encountered insurmountable difficulties because those environments did not belong to his direct experience. Thus, he could not represent them, as he had planned to do.

[19] Its greatest achievements were certainly concerned with this social context.

3) The Concept of Truth

In the theoretical writings I have examined, both George Eliot and Giovanni Verga underline the importance that the concept of truth had for them as novelists. I think that a clarification of what truth meant for them as far as the creation of a novel was concerned is important to understand the nature of their Realism.

In the chapter XVII of Adam Bede George Eliot writes that she wants to avoid 'falsity' [20] in her novel, that 'Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult'; [21] in The Natural History of German Life she talks of 'truthfulness' [22] as a value to achieve in the representation of life. In his preface to I Malavoglia Verga describes his study as 'sincere'; [23] he then points out that the novelist has to be sincere, to tell the truth in order to offer an exact artistic description of life; and he mentions the word 'truth' [24] once again in the course of the preface. The insistence on the concept of truth throws a light on George Eliot and Giovanni Verga's peculiar attitudes towards Realism. In fact, to talk about truthfulness and to talk about impartiality or objectivity is different. In this regard, the essay The Natural History of German Life is very helpful. George Eliot writes:

> The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelists is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on

[20] G. Eliot, Adam Bede, op. cit., p. 114
[21] ibid.
[22] G. Eliot, 'The Natural..., op. cit.,p. 268
[23] G. Verga, I Malavoglia., op. cit..p. 3. The Italian original is: 'sincero'

> generalisations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment. [25]

Later in the same essay she writes that

> Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. [26]

This was the main aim of George Eliot's narrative; she wanted her readers to sympathise with the characters of her novels. The faithful representation of ordinary events and people was aimed at because the more exact the description was the more the reader would have sympathised with the characters; the more she dealt with ordinary people the wider her reader's sympathies would have become. Realism was not the end but a means of her art. She dealt with 'the peasant in all his coarse apathy' [27] or with 'the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness',[28] but she infused her representation with sympathy, because

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[24] ibid.,p.4. The Italian original is: 'verita''
[25] G. Eliot, 'The Natural..., op. cit., p. 270
[26] ibid.,p. 271
[27] ibid.
[28] ibid.

she wanted the reader to 'feel' [29] for her characters. This gives a reason for the intrusive authorial comments and for the narrator's sympathy towards some characters which we notice both in her early works and in more mature novels, such as The Mill on the Floss and Middlemarch. Furthermore, it explains also the psychological penetration of her characterisation, the ability to portray the inner life of her characters. When George Henry Lewes explained to what extent Idealism was based on Realism, he said that he preferred portraits recording inner life rather than portraits superbly focusing on external life. This was the attitude of George Eliot when dealing with her most complex characters. William J. Hyde in his article 'George Eliot and the Climate of Realism' points out that

> George Eliot's tendency to sympathise led her from a realism that was daring to one that was profound. The accurate penetration of her characters, especially in *Middlemarch*, is based on a realism charged with such idealism as Lewes had described. [30]

The emphasis Verga laid on the concept of truth was different from George Eliot's; it brought different consequences. In his case as in George Eliot's, his literary realist attitude was not characterised by a rigorous acceptance of Zola's theory of Le Roman Experimental, according to which the writer's task was compared to that of the scientist examining data in a laboratory. Therefore, the writer represented his characters'

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[29] ibid.
[30] W.J. Hyde, 'George Eliot and the Climate of Realism', Publications of Modern Language Association of America,vol. LXXII, 1957, p. 163

life in a specific environment as if it were ruled by scientific laws. Actually, Italian Verismo never accepted this strict and severe artistic attitude. In Italy the acceptance of Taine, Zola and the other Naturalists' ideas was intermingled with typically Italian cultural elements, which can be summarised with Francesco De Sanctis' critical attitude. The most important Italian critic of the period pointed out the necessity to combine this new born love for reality with the aspiration to a creative and imaginative art, not necessarily suffocated by science's developments. These ideas influenced Italian Veristi as much as, or probably more than, the ideas emerging from Balzac, Flaubert, Goncourt, and Zola's works. For the Veristi, and especially for Verga, the aesthetic principle took precedence over the scientific one, the aesthetic experimentation was more important than the attempt to apply the natural laws to the artistic work. The realistic concept they focused on was the belief that artistic form participates in the evolutionary process, and, therefore, must be adjusted to the historical, social context and to the change of subjects. The concept of truth was not a scientific concept for the Veristi. This naturally limited the influence of certain positivist biological and psychiatric topics in their works, and hindered the establishment of a verista school. Thus, in Verga's case we can say that the realistic faithfulness to reality had become impartial love for truth. In a letter to Salvatore Paola Verdura he pointed out that with the term Realism he meant 'the genuine and pure manifestation of careful observation'; [31] these words recall to mind the description of I Malavoglia as a sincere and dispassionate study. It is evident the emphasis Verga laid on the concept of truth, on the necessity for the novelist to provide the reader with a

[31] This letter is quoted by C. Riccardi in her Introduction to I Malavoglia, op. cit., p. XI. The Italian

description of reality (and we have seen which slice of reality Verga was concerned with) developed from direct and sincere observation. It will be very important for him to find aesthetic narrative devices which mirrored this intention; we notice in Verga the intention typical of Realism to switch from a panoramic to a dramatic type of narrative. I will underline in the next section the devices Verga employed in order to achieve this aim; what is relevant at this stage of our discussion is to emphasise that Verga felt the necessity to be impartial, objective. The emphasis on the concept of truthfulness did not bring Verga either to a sympathetic involvement with his characters' representation, or to a psychological penetration of his characters. In his preface to I Malavoglia, Verga says that the novelist, who he refers to as an observer, is part of the life he describes; he has the right to show interest for the weak, the losers he represented, but he has not the right to judge. He writes that

> He who observes the show does not have the right to judge it. It is sufficient if he will be able to leave for a moment the battle-field in order to study the battle without passion, and to describe the scene accurately, with adequate colours, so as to give the representation of the reality as it has been, or as it should have been.[32]

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original is : 'la schietta ed evidente manifestazione dell'osservazione coscienziosa'.

[32] G. Verga, I Malavoglia, op. cit., p.5. The Italian original is: 'Chi osserva questo spettacolo non ha il diritto di giudicarlo; e' gia' molto se riesce a trarsi un istante fuori dal campo della lotta per studiarla senza passione, e rendere la scena nettamente, coi colori adatti, tale da dare la rappresentazione della realta' com'e' stata, o come avrebbe dovuto essere.'

(I will explain later why he used the image for the battle-field to describe life). Nevertheless, the ordinary situations and people he dealt with were for him the symbol of the whole human situation he himself was part of; as we have seen, he stated that the novelist participated in this battle of life. Only in this respect was the novelist involved with the subject he was interested in, however, description could not fail to be true and impartial. Asor Rosa explains that

> ...truth, therefore, does not coincide with the exactness of the document, but with the significance and the profundity of every narrated story. [33]

The critic points out that in this way Verga can be considered a poet, but, and this is a very important aspect of Verga's art, he never represented the events or the characters as different in any ways from what they really were; his representation of reality was faithful, what he had done was just '...to broaden the interpretation of it in order to stress the universality of the situation described'. [34]

4) The Influence of Positivism on Eliot and Verga's Art

It is worth underlining at this point of our discussion that both George Eliot and Verga could give a representation of reality so characterised thanks to the influence Positivism had had on their cultural backgrounds.

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[33] A. Asor Rosa, Storia della Letteratura Italiana, Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1991. p. 509

George Eliot was certainly influenced by the organicist theory; we know she was well acquainted with Comte, Spencer, Darwin's theories and obviously with Lewes' ideas. She believed in the interrelation between the parts and the whole; the single parts had a meaning and an importance only inside the whole. This meant for her that individuals were strictly linked to the social environment they lived in; their actions could not but be influenced by the social system, and they had to be respectful of it. In The Mill on the Floss Maggie's development is linked to her family and to St. Ogg's society. Middlemarch is clearly influenced by this organicist theory. When the characters are introduced in the first chapter, they are not referred to as single individuals, but their features, their personalities are described in relation with the society of Middlemarch. The web metaphor, which is a central and basic image in the novel, explains this theory of strong interconnection between the individuals and social environment; it underlines the fact that all the components of Middlemarch life are connected with one another, and this idea also influences the narrative structure, to which the web metaphor applies too. In this regard, it is certainly important to point out that Lydgate looks for the one primitive tissue; Casaubon for the Key To all Mythologies; and similarly, as Shuttleworth notes,[35] Dorothea looks for a 'binding theory which would bring her own life and doctrine into strict connection with that amazing past'.[36]

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[34] ibid.

[35] S. Shuttleworth, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science.The Make-Believe of a Beginning, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. p. 146

Nevertheless, in both novels George Eliot underlines the conflict between the individual and society. In The Mill on the Floss George Eliot seems to point out the conflict between the outside and the inside, between the individual's own personality and the scientific law of adaptation to one's own social environment in order to grow and develop. This conflict is clearly personified by Maggie, but, as Shuttleworth points out, '...Maggie's conflict is not simply created by her passionate nature; it is a product of history, both social and biological'.[37] Thus, Darwinian theory is used in the novel not to show how the individuals adapt themselves to the environment they live in, but how it is impossible for Maggie to survive in her environment. In Middlemarch too a conflict between social environment and the individual is shown; the characters all fail (except the Garths) to adapt their own ideas, feelings, ambitions to the social context. There is an imbalance between the self and the social, between egoism and social duty. In other words, it is not easy for the ethics of self-surrender and social duty to prevail. The fact that George Eliot has underlined the existence of this conflict between individual and society, clearly demonstrates that she saw the ambiguities, the contradictions lying in the positivist scientific and organicist theory. In her novels she wanted to represent the complexity of life, therefore, she could not but point out both the need for a scientific, objective representation of reality and for ethical comments on events. She tried both to

[36] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op.cit.,pp.76-7
[37] S. Shuttleworth, op. cit.,p. 57

present her material faithfully, according to the laws of cause and effect which govern human society, and to give 'a subjective view of the human value within it'.[38]

The awareness of this imbalance led both to thematic and to stylistic consequences. The end of The Mill on the Floss, for example, seems to show that George Eliot could not make Maggie surrender to the deterministic law of obedience to an external order; thus, she made her die. We know how much this ending has been criticised because it seems rather a melodramatic ending, something which was not spontaneously and logically linked with the rest of the narration. However, we may suppose that the reason why this ending seems not to flow spontaneously from the rest of the plot lies in the fact that, on the one hand, George Eliot believed in the positive concept of development, in the fact that the individual could improve his conditions inside his social environment according to the law of cause and the effect; but, on the other hand, she felt that the gap, the conflict between individual will and social duty was too strong to be resolved. She could have made Maggie surrender to her individual desires for the integration into society, but she did not, she made her die. George Eliot emphasised the same conflict in Dorothea's experience; she made her marry Will and go away from Middlemarch.

This conflict is exemplified also in the narrative structure; the beginning of The Mill on the Floss, for example, breaks the linear flow of time. The novel starts with the

[38] P. Stoneman, 'George Eliot: Middlemarch (1871 - 2)', in The Monster in the Mirror. Studies in

narrator's memories, and later the actual narration starts. Shuttleworth talks of a double beginning and also of a double ending for The Mill on the Floss; the critic points out that the first ending is the moment when

> ...Maggie and Tom, in their final embrace, enter the timeless world of memory and the unconscious, and recapture for ever their childhood. The second is contained in the narrator's comment: "nature repairs her ravages - but not all". [39]

The structure of Middlemarch clearly exemplifies the fact that George Eliot considered complexity one of the main features of life. For example, the stories of the characters are related to one another by means of analogies; George Eliot used many symbolic and metaphoric images, which was not typical of a positivist and realistic work; there are intrusive authorial comments throughout the novel. I will discuss in the next section the narrative technique employed by George Eliot.

Also in Verga's case, what we consider his realist novels were influenced by the positivist ideas. What is important to notice in this regard, is that he too wanted to write a cycle of novels, as Zola did with the Rougon - Macquart. We know from the preface to I Malavoglia that he had planned to write five novels: I Malavoglia, which had to represent the lowest social level; Mastro don Gesualdo, the recently-arrived middle class; La

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Nineteenth - Century Realism., Ed. D.A. Williams, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978. p. 107

Duchessa di Leyra, the nobility; L'Onorevole Scipioni, the political world; L'Uomo di Lusso, the intellectual and artistic world.[40] Thus, it seems that Verga too wanted to show with his artistic works the complexity of life by analysing the different social classes' attitudes towards life. It is therefore clear that the social environment was important also for the Italian writer, but the conclusions he came to were strikingly different from the positivist theories. The peculiar setting and social environment of his novels led to a different vision of the social process. The social background where the positivistic theories developed was characterised by the existence of a dominant and self-confident middle class; the Italian verista's social context, on the contrary, was characterised by a weak and unstable middle class and by a huge number of peasants. The conditions of the peasants could not be analysed according to determinist positivist theories, which were believed able to resolve the contradictions and to explain reality. Positivists wanted to find a basic law explaining the concatenation of both biological and historical events. They thought that reality and rationality were connected, and consequently that the human intellect could explain reality. They believed in the connection between natural and human development; they thought that it was possible to achieve the latter by an appropriate use of mind. This was clearly the ideology of the middle class which had just become the dominant social class all over Europe, and which tended to consider its dominion as valid as a natural process. Verga's adoption of positivist theories could not but be different, since he dealt with a world, that of the Sicilian peasants, which was completely different from that of the middle class. He could not explain what happened in

[39] S. Shuttleworth, op. cit., p. 53

this world according to the idea of the natural processes leading to human progress. Actually, his novels draw attention to the negative consequences of the economic and social development on the lives of the single individuals. In the Preface to I Malavoglia Verga points out that

> The inevitable, incessant, often tiring and restless journey made by humanity in order to gain progress is great in its result, considered as a whole, from a distance.[41]

But, if one observes it from a short distance, one cannot fail to focus on the

> ...idle who let themselves be overtaken in order to finish earlier; the losers who raise their desperate arms, and duck their heads under the brutal foot of those who are approaching; today's winners, they too in a hurry, who will be tomorrow losers.[42]

Verga's novels show that the Darwinian theory of the evolution of the species, if applied to the everyday context he analysed, turns into the fierce rule of the fight for life. The admiration for humanity's progress when felt by humble characters produces an

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[40] I have already noticed that Verga wrote only the first two novels.

[41] G. Verga, I Malavoglia,op. cit., p. 4. The Italian original is: 'Il cammino fatale, incessante, spesso faticoso e febbrile che segue l'umanita' per raggiungere la conquista del progresso, e' grandioso nel suo risultato, visto nell'insieme, da lontano.'

irrational heap of sufferings. I Malavoglia, for example, are concerned with the story of a Sicilian family of fishermen, who try to improve economically, but actually end up disintegrated. The only concern for the individuals belonging to that elementary anthropological dimension is to try to survive. The central nucleus in this world is the family. Feelings, affections outside that dimension, are considered guilty and are condemned. This elementary anthropological dimension does not allow hopes or changes; these are rather dangerous. He who wants to change his situation is guilty of going against his society's laws and habits. This is shown in I Malavoglia, but also in Mastro don Gesualdo, where a higher social level is represented. In his novel Fantasticheria Verga underlined this concept by comparing the acceptance by these poor people of their destiny, of the sufferings, of the values connected with their social environment, with the oyster's attachment to its rock. He writes that

> ...when one of those small individuals, either weaker, or more incautious, or more selfish than the others, wanted to leave the group because he longed for the unknown, or because he wanted to improve, or because he wanted to know the world, the world, which is a voracious fish, swallowed him and those closer to him. [43]

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[42] ibid.,pp.4-5. The Italian original is: '...ai fiacchi che si lasciano sorpassare dall'onda per finire piu' presto, ai vinti che levano le braccia disperate, e piegano il capo sotto il piede brutale dei sopravvegnenti, I vincitori d'oggi, affrettati anch'essi, avidi anch'essi d'arrivare, e che saranno sorpassati domani.'

[43] G. Verga, 'Fantasticheria', in G. Verga, Tutte le Novelle, op. cit., pp. 127-8. The Italian original is: '...allorquando uno di quei piccoli, o piu' debole, o piu' incauto, o piu' egoista degli altri, volle staccarsi dal gruppo per vaghezza dell'ignoto, o per brama di meglio, o per curiosita' di conoscere il mondo, il mondo da pesce vorace com'e', se lo ingoio', e i suoi piu' prossimi con lui.'

5) Eliot and Verga's Narrative Techniques

George Eliot and Verga's narrative techniques were different from one another, the one using the intrusive omniscient narrator convention, the other attempting, throughout his naturalist season, to achieve an impersonal and objective mode of narration.

After all we have been saying of George Eliot throughout this discussion, it is clear that Realism was not her main aim as a novelist; she wanted to broaden her readers' sympathies and to represent the complexity of life. While, as I have noticed, she fully discussed what Realism meant for her in terms of thematic choice, of subject matter, she never gave any indications about the narrative method she wanted to use in order to attain a faithful description of life. Actually, in chapter XVII of Adam Bede, which I have quoted as a testimony of her concern with Realism, she writes that 'The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused...'. [44] Therefore, she seemed to be aware of the ambiguity of such concepts as realist representation of life or objective and impartial description of events, because these would be anyway altered, disturbed by the artistic medium. The point of view she adopted in her novels was that of the omniscient narrator. Thus, her narrator knows everything about characters and events; he or she can manipulate time and go from one place to another freely; he or she can shift from one character to another; he or she can represent

[44] G. Eliot, Adam Bede ,op. cit.,p.265

not only the characters' actions and words, but also their feelings and thoughts, and can select which speeches, actions, feelings to represent. This narrator often says 'I' and interrupts the narration in order to give his own ethical, moral comment about the particular situation or the character in question, and to express his or her view about mankind and human life in general, often by directly addressing to the reader. The beginning of Amos Barton is a good example of the omniscient narrator point of view:

> Shepperton Church was a very different-looking building five-and- twenty years ago. To be sure, its substantial stone tower looks at you through its intelligent eye, the clock with the friendly expression of former days; but in everything else what changes! Now there is... [45]

The reader must rely on the narrator for the comparison of Shepperton Church as it was at the time of the narration and as it was twenty five years ago; furthermore, the reader is explicitly addressed by the narrator.

As I have said, George Eliot frequently interferes in the course of the narration by means of moral comments; these comments are compatible with her aim to enlarge the reader's sympathies. She shifts from considerations about the character's situation to general considerations about human life. As Isobel Armstrong points out,[46] in the passage

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[45] G. Eliot, 'The Sad Fortunes..., op. cit., p. 41
[46] I. Armstrong, 'Middlemarch': a Note on George Eliot's 'Wisdom', in Critical Essays on George Eliot, Ed. Barbara Hardy, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970. p. 127

> Our good depends on the quality and breadth of our emotion; and to Will...to have such feelings as he had towards Dorothea, was like the inheritance of a fortune. [47]

George Eliot moves from a generalisation to an account of Will's feelings; this shift from the general to the particular is underlined by the change from the first person plural to the third person singular. However, the change is not easily noticeable; in this regard, the critic notes that the general comment

> ...is separated from the particular description of Will's state only by a semicolon. The reader's world and the world of the novel are bound together syntactically and by the overriding continuity of 'and'. [48]

In her analysis of the authorial comments in Middlemarch (which she preferred to call George Eliot' s wisdom), the critic points out the fact that these comments or sayings, as we want to call them, are integrated in the novel's structure both from a theoretical point of view, as I have already noticed, and from a strictly structural point of view. Isobel Armstrong underlines that George Eliot 'moves, in effect, between diagram and

[47] G.Eliot, Middlemarch, Ed. M. Drabble, op. cit., p. 427
[48] I. Armstrong, op. cit.,p. 127

picture',[49] because she shifts from general comments to particular ones. Furthermore, she points out that these comments

> ...do not play ambiguously with our responses; when she asks a question - as she frequently does - it usually demands the answer 'Yes'.[50]

Actually, George Eliot's sayings often become proverbs, as for example: 'one must be poor to know the luxury of giving'.[51] This is a rather different interpretation of George Eliot's intrusive authorial comment; critics have often complained about the fact that there are too many interferences throughout her novels, which interrupt the flow of the narration. Actually, there is sometimes too much of authorial comment in her novels and we would rather prefer a dramatic explanation of her characters' actions and thoughts; but, I think this narrative mode generally suits George Eliot's theoretical opinion about what a work of art should achieve. However, to talk of George Eliot's narrative technique is not so simple. We must still point out that she attempted to achieve also from a narrative point of view a description of life which showed all its complexity. This means that in her novels she was not concerned with the characterisation only of the main protagonist; on the contrary, she tried to give a complete representation of all the

[49] ibid.,p. 121
[50] ibid.,p. 122
[51] G. Eliot, Middlemarch, op. cit., p. 154

characters involved. In Middlemarch the narrator says '...Dorothea - but why always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with regard to this marriage?'. [52]

What is very interesting to notice in a discussion about George Eliot and Realism is the fact that she made her characters speak in the idiom of their class; and, what is more, that in her novels (I am thinking especially of The Mill on the Floss and Middlemarch) the reader is sometimes given the character's point of view. I mean that we read of the characters' thoughts, emotions as if they were represented directly by them, without any strong narrative filter. In fact, George Eliot employed the free indirect speech device in some of her novels. As we will see in a while, this narrative device was used by Verga in order to give an impartial representation of his characters' life, which was one of the main aim of his novels. In The Mill on the Floss, for example, in the book 'Boy and Girl', when Mr Tulliver goes to his sister's in order to have back the money he had lent to her husband, the narrator says:

> That arrow went straight to Mr Tulliver's heart. He had not a rapid imagination, but the thought of Maggie was very near to him, and he was not long in seeing his relation to his sister side by side with Tom's relation to Maggie. Would the little wench ever be poorly off, and Tom rather hard upon her ? [53]

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[52] ibid., p. 253
[53] G. Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993, pp. 73-4

Here the point of view is that of the omniscient narrator, but the last sentence quoted is an example of free indirect speech; we seem to read Mr Tulliver's thoughts without any interference from the narrator.

Verga , unlike George Eliot, has left us explicit testimonies of what he wanted to achieve in terms of narrative technique. In the preface to the novella L'Amante di Gramigna, he writes that a novel would be perfect when 'the process of the creation would remain a mystery, as the development of human passions',[54] when

> ...the artist's hand will remain invisible and the novel will be a whole with the event in itself, when the work of art will seem *to be self-made*, to have developed and be born spontaneously as a natural fact, without keeping any point of contact with its author...[55]

Throughout his verista career, Verga aimed at this impartial and objective narration, because he wanted to describe events as they had really happened without the interference of the authorial filter. The main difficulty was to find stylistic and linguistic devices which could fill the gap existing between the subject and the object of the narration.

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[54] G. Verga, 'L'Amante di Gramigna', in G. Verga, Tutte le Novelle, op. cit., p. 192. The Italian original is: 'il processo della creazione rimarra' un mistero, come lo svolgersi delle passioni umane'

[55] ibid. The Italian original is: '...la mano dell' artista rimarra' assolutamente invisibile, e il romanzo avra' l'impronta dell' avvenimento reale, e l'opera d'arte sembrera' *essersi fatta da se'*, aver maturato ed essere sorta spontanea come un fatto naturale, senza serbare alcun punto di contatto col suo autore...'

In the novella Nedda, which can be considered Verga's first verista work, we notice the coexistence of two linguistic registers. There is both a literary language, and a mechanical and isolated record of dialectal expressions. It is obvious that in Nedda the distance between the cultivated bourgeois intellectual and the peasants' world is still huge. Verga had not found yet the linguistic and stylistic devices appropriate to give a faithful representation of that social context. Nevertheless, there is in Nedda an attempt at free indirect speech, which Verga superbly used in his mature novel I Malavoglia in order to give the reader the character's point of view without the authorial medium. The problem Verga had to face in order to achieve this result was to transform that mechanical record of dialect into something vivid which really was the record of the characters' speeches, actions and world. It was not merely a lexical problem, but a syntactic one. This means that Verga worked on 'a lexical context ready to accept any idiomatic forms',[56] but which 'belonged to standard Italian from a morphological point of view',[57] and what he attempted to do was to bring in this context 'the syntax, inflections, rhythm typical of the dialect'.[58] In order to do this, it was necessary for Verga to leave the cultivated narrator's point of view and to adopt the point of view of an ordinary narrator, capable of recording events, situations, impressions, opinions according to the cultural context of the characters. Many expressions used by Verga both in his novella published in the volume

[56] V. Masiello,'La Lingua del Verga tra Mimesi Dialettale e Realismo Critico', in Il Caso Verga, Ed. A. Asor Rosa, Palermo: Palumbo, 1987. p. 97
[57] ibid.
[58] ibid.

Vita dei Campi (1881) [59] and in I Malavoglia are lexically and grammatically correct, but they refer to the social, cultural context of the characters; therefore, to a primitive level of experience. The beginning of the novella Jeli il Pastore (Jeli the Shepherd) is a good example of what I am saying:

> Jeli, the horses' keeper, was thirteen years old when he met Don Alfonso, the lord; but he was so short that he could not touch the belly of *bianca*, the old mare... [60]

Here it is the village community which informs the reader that Don Alfonso is called 'lord' (signorino); it is an information which is linked to the specific social content. Furthermore, the use of the expression 'he could not touch the belly of *bianca*' in order to emphasise how short Jeli was, is clearly linked, once again, to Jeli's village everyday life. The cultivated bourgeois narrator does not know how big Bianca is; that information is relevant and appropriate only inside the specific context described in the novel. In the novella Rosso Malpelo [61] we read: 'Malpelo was so named because he had red hair; and he had red hair because he was a malicious and wicked boy...'. [62] The belief that to be red-haired is a sign of bad moral qualities is obviously typical of the peasants' community

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[59] He worked on these novelle and on I Malavoglia in the same period.
[60] G. Verga, 'Jeli il Pastore', in G. Verga, Tutte le Novelle , op.cit.,p. 129. The Italian original is: 'Jeli, il guardiano di cavalli, aveva tredici anni quando conobbe don Alfonso, il signorino; ma era cosi' piccolo che non arrivava alla pancia della *bianca*, la vecchia giumenta...'
[61] This is the name of the protagonist. The name shows that the character is red-haired and wicked.
[62] G.Verga, 'Rosso Malpelo', in G. Verga, Tutte le Novelle, op. cit.,p. 163. The Italian original is: 'Malpelo si chiamava cosi' perche' aveva i capelli rossi; e aveva i capelli rossi perche' era un ragazzo malizioso e cattivo...'

Verga deals with in this novella; it is not an opinion of the cultivated narrator. Therefore, we can say that the reader of Verga's veristi works often has the impression that the village community gives its own opinions about events and situations. In this sense, Verga's masterpiece is I Malavoglia. In this novel he narrates the events as if 'they were mirrored in the brains and hearts' of his characters'.[63] In this novel Verga puts in practice the plan of a verista narration which he had theorised in his preface to L'Amante di Gramigna; he employs a

> ...narrative technique which, as in Flaubert's theory, abolishes the direct and visible presence of the narrator, who becomes only the invisible director of the narration, the omnipresent and hidden god. [64]

According to this narrative technique, Verga in I Malavoglia used at his best free indirect speech; the reader is frequently given the characters' words, thoughts, opinions as if they talked, thought in front of him, without the authorial medium. At the beginning of the fourth chapter of the novel, for example, Verga writes of one of his characters, zio Crocifisso:

> ...but he had as much money as they needed, and if someone asked him twelve tari' he soon lent them to him in pawn, because <<he who lends

[63] L. Spitzer, 'L'Originalita' della Narrazione nei <<Malavoglia>>', Belfagor, vol. XI, 1, 1956. p. 46
[64] V. Masiello, op. cit., p. 102

money to a friend without requiring a pawn loses both the friend, the money and the talent>>...[65]

Here the reader is given a saying but not by means of intrusive authorial comment, as it happens in George Eliot's novels. Here it is zio Crocifisso (therefore, one of the members of the social community Verga dealt with in this novel) who seems to say it; from a semantic point of view, it seems clear that this saying is part of the cultural context of this social environment and not of the cultivated narrator's. It is obvious that in the course of the narration there is the presence of the narrator who gives the directions; as I have already noticed the 20th century reader knows that a wholly impartial, self-made narration is impossible to achieve. In this regard, it is interesting to notice that the further development of Verga's literary career shows a sort of detachment from this verista narrative technique and a more visible presence of the narrator.

After what we have said, it seems clear that George Eliot and Verga's interpretations of Realism were linked to the social and cultural contexts they belonged to, which were different from the French one, and, of course, were different from one another. Their approaches towards the contemporary literary tendencies show both similarities and differences. Both writers aimed at a truthful and objective representation of reality; the intention of both novelists was to deal with ordinary characters and

[65] G.Verga, I Malavoglia,op. cit.,p. 40. The Italian original is: '...ma aveva denari sin che ne volevano, e se qualcheduno andava a chiedergli dodici tari' glieli prestava subito, col pegno, perche' <<chi fa credenza senza pegno, perde l'amico, la roba e l'ingegno>>...'

everyday events. However, the purpose they wanted to achieve was different. Realism for George Eliot was not an end in itself, but a means to an end, her purpose being to enlarge her readers' sympathies. But to provide the readers with a representation of reality as it really was Verga's main aim. This led to basic differences as far as the narrative techniques and the question of the points of view were concerned. While George Eliot employed the omniscient narrator convention, and, therefore, allowed the narrator to interfere in the course of the narration by means of ethical comments, Verga aimed at an impartial and objective narration. He maintained that the readers of his veriste novelle and novels would have the impression that those works were self-made, that the author had completely disappeared. The use he made of the narrative techniques and of the language represents an important stage in the development of Italian literature.

III. The Victorian View of Italy

In her works George Eliot often dealt with Italy and with Italian culture; the most evident example of her interest in Italy is Romola, which is entirely set in that country, as we will see in the next chapter. I think that before discussing Eliot's view of Renaissance Italy as it emerges from the novel, it is worth examining the nature and main features of Victorian interest in Italy. In fact, during the Victorian age Italy and its past, its art, its architecture, its politics were studied and were, therefore, the subject of many works produced in that period. The reasons for this interest are numerous; C.P. Brand in his study of Italy and English Romanticism explains both the rise and the fall of the English interest in Italy in terms of fashion and, therefore, thought it was superficial. However, he also maintains that '...alongside this fashionable, rather superficial interest there was a good deal of serious and scholarly study of Italian life and culture'.[1] It is interesting to notice what Brand writes at the end of his study; he points out that

> ...neither the Italian language, nor the literature, nor the music, nor the visual arts commanded that fashionable attention which they had known in the days of Byron and Shelley. Even Browning's 'liking for Italy' he once said, was a 'purely selfish one; I felt alone with my own soul there'. [2]

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[1] C.P. Brand,Italy and the English Romantics. The Italianate Fashion in Early Nineteenth-Century England, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957, p. 228
[2] ibid., p. 231

An important element is underlined here; the different treatment Italy had during Romanticism and during the Victorian period. Actually, a development from Romantic sensationalism to a more realistic and less idealised view of Italy has often been noticed. I will not say whether this development can be considered in negative or positive terms; what I am interested in is understanding the nature and the characteristics of Victorian interest in Italy, in underlining which aspects of Italian past and present culture the Victorians were concerned with, as far as this can be helpful for a deeper and more complete study of George Eliot's involvement in Italy as it appears in Romola. Therefore, I will first discuss Ruskin, Symonds, and Pater's view of Italy, which provides a helpful background for our study of Romola; I will then examine the presence of Italian setting and characters in Victorian fiction, and in the works of E. M. Forster and D.H. Lawrence. The analysis of the main features of these works will be aimed at a deeper and more thorough understanding of Romola; in fact, it will not be a comprehensive analysis of the works in question. In this chapter I will try to point out how the Victorian view of Italy developed, how it led to late 19th and early 20th century works, especially to Forster and Lawrence's, in order to understand better the features and the function of the picture of Italy George Eliot gave in Romola, and the place this novel occupied in Victorian fiction on Italy.

1) Ruskin, Symonds and Pater: the Philosophical Approaches to Italy

The opening sentence of The Stones of Venice is a good starting point for a discussion about the nature of Ruskin's interest in Italy. The passage focuses on some basic aspects of his involvement with the country. He writes:

> Since first the dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands: the thrones of Tyre, Venice and England. Of the First of these great powers only the memory remains; of the Second, the ruin; the Third, which inherits their greatness, if it forgets their example, may be led through prouder eminence to less pitied destruction. [3]

This passage gives the reader some important information. In it Ruskin emphasises the historical importance of Venice; he points out that he was aware of the decline the city was undergoing; that he felt a link existed between Venice and contemporary England. I will start this discussion by analysing what this link between Venice and Victorian England consisted in.

[3] J. Ruskin., The Stones of Venice, London: George Allen, 1905, vol. I, p.1

According to Ruskin, the example of Italian greatness had to reawaken the consciousness of contemporary England, which he saw characterised by insensitivity, vulgarity, and by a degradation of humanity due to industrial and commercial developments. In his chapter on 'The Nature of Gothic' he points out that 'all Europe at this day'[4] had to regain that 'freedom of thought, and rank in scale of being, such as no laws, no charters can secure'.[5] Gothic art and the context in which it developed were characterised by a freedom, which was lost because of the

> ...degradation of the operative into a machine, which, more than any other evil of the times, is leading the mass of the nation everywhere into vain, incoherent, destructive struggling for a freedom of which they can not explain the nature to themselves. [6]

He emphasises the feeling of alienation from his own work and from society man was experiencing; he wrote:

> It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread, and therefore look to wealth as the only means of pleasure. It is not that men are pained by the scorn of the upper classes, but they cannot endure their own; for they feel that the kind of

[4] ibid., vol.II, p. 161
[5] ibid.
[6] ibid.

labour to which they are condemned is verily a degrading one, and make them less than men.[7]

The theme of the negative nature of the growing industrial and mechanical development has old roots; it can already be found in Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, and will be found in many of the authors I am going to deal with until D.H. Lawrence. The proposed solution to this problem varied; but we can generally say that in all cases it included the desire, the attempt to escape to an uncontaminated place. The commonest poles of the dichotomy are usually the North as opposed to the South, or the past contrasted with the present. In Ruskin's case the 'other' place opposed to the vulgarity of his age is, as we have read in the first sentence of The Stones of Venice, Venice. Later in the chapter he explains why he chose this city. He points out that when the Roman Empire was declining, when its religion

...was laid asleep in a glittering sepulchre, the living light rose upon both horizons, and the fierce swords of the Lombard and Arab were shaken over its golden paralysis. [8]

The role of the Lombards and of the Arabs was respectively 'to give hardihood and system to the enervated body and enfeebled mind of Christendom',[9] and ' to punish idolatry, and to proclaim the spirituality of worship'.[10] After explaining this, Ruskin notes that

[7] ibid.

> Opposite in their character and mission, alike in their magnificence of energy, they came from the North and from the South, the glacier torrent and the lava stream: they met and contended over the wreck of the Roman Empire; and the very centre of the struggle, the point of pause of both, the dead water of the opposite eddies, charged with emboyed fragments of the Roman wreck, is VENICE. [11]

Ruskin was nevertheless aware of the decline Venice had experienced and was still undergoing; in the opening sentence of The Stones of Venice he links the image of the city with that of the ruins. He then provides the reader with this image of Venice in the period of her decline, a decline which continues up to the present days:

> ...a ghost upon the sands of the sea, so weak, so quiet; so bereft of all but her loveliness, that we might well doubt as we watched her in faint reflection in the mirage of the lagoon, which was the City, and which the Shadow.[12]

His aim was to record as much as possible of the beauty of the city before everything would have been destroyed, 'to trace the lines of this image before it be for ever lost'.[13]

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[8] ibid. ,vol.I, p. 16
[9] ibid.
[10] ibid.
[11] ibid.,p.17
[12] ibid.,p. 1
[13] ibid.,pp. 1-2

He disapproved of the fact that industrial development was also reaching Venice, and of the horrible conditions of the Venetian buildings. This too was a common aspect in the Victorian view of Italy; those who saw in Italy the solution to the decay of their contemporary England had to become more and more aware of the failure of their hopes.

In The Stones of Venice Ruskin identified the beginning of the decline of Venice in the year 1418. One cannot fail to notice that he placed the beginning of the city's decay in the period between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance. Actually, his view of the Renaissance was negative, and completely different from that of Symonds and Pater. While Pater and Symonds considered it as the age of the rebirth, as I will point out later in this section, Ruskin considered the Middle Ages as a period of spiritual greatness in every aspect of social and cultural life, and the Renaissance as characterised by slavery. Throughout the Victorian period it will be more common to read studies and novels concerned with the Renaissance period and contrasting Ruskin's view. It will be interesting to point out how George Eliot's picture of 15th century Romola can be considered Ruskinian to a certain extent, but how, on the other hand, it is linked with the later Victorian developments of a different concept of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Ruskin saw in the passage from a religious culture to one considering the human element as the centre of the universe the reason for the moral decline characterising the historical development from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. He describes

Renaissance art as 'rationalistic',[14] as 'pestilent',[15] and believes it was characterised by 'a return to pagan systems'.[16] Venice took part in this decline; he points out that

> ...as she was once the most religious, was in her fall the most corrupt of European states; and as she was in her strength the centre of the pure currents of Christian architecture, so she is in her decline the source of the Renaissance. [17]

In the 'Nature of Gothic' Ruskin underlines the main elements which made Gothic art so great; they were savageness, changefulness, naturalism, grotesqueness, rigidity and redundance. These elements were all destroyed by Renaissance art, which was rather characterised by a search for perfection, and by an absence of variety. Ruskin points out that

> ...neither architecture nor any other noble work of man can be good unless it be imperfect; and let us be prepared for the otherwise strange fact, which we shall discern clearly as we approach the period of the Renaissance, that the first cause of the arts of Europe was a relentless requirement of

[14] ibid., p.23
[15] ibid.,p.25
[16] ibid.,p.23
[17] ibid., p.24

> perfection incapable alike either of being silenced by veneration for greatness, or softened into forgiveness of simplicity.[18]

The two main causes of natural decline in Renaissance art were 'over-luxuriance'[19] and 'over-refinement'; [20] 'luxuriance of ornament, refinement of execution, and idle subtleties of fancy' [21] took the place of ' true thought and firm handling'.[22] Renaissance art looked for perfection of execution and fullness of knowledge at the expense of invention, of savageness, rudeness, which, as we have seen, were considered by Ruskin the main qualities of Gothic art. In the chapter 'Roman Renaissance' he points out as a major feature of the Renaissance school the

> ...introduction of accurate knowledge into all its work, so far as it possesses such knowledge; and its evident conviction that such science is necessary to the excellence of the work, and is the first thing to be expressed therein'.[23]

The great mistake of the Renaissance was to believe that art and science were the same thing, whereas, according to Ruskin, science aims at knowing and art at changing,

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[18] ibid., vol. II, p.169
[19] ibid.,vol.III,p.3
[20] ibid.
[21] ibid.
[22] ibid.
[23] ibid.,p.35

producing, creating; that science 'deals exclusively with things as they are in themselves',[24] while art 'exclusively with things as they affect the human sense and human soul';[25] in this respect it is concerned with ' a field of question just as much vaster than that of science, as the soul is larger than the material creation'.[26] Therefore, the role of the artist is to see and to feel, he must possess the perceptive, sensitive, retentive faculties. The evil of the Renaissance system is the fact that '...knowledge is thought the one and only good, and it is never inquired whether men are vivified by it or paralysed'.[27] The Renaissance man 'under the weight of his knowledge'[28] cannot 'move so lightly as in the days of his simplicity'.[29] Furthermore, the Renaissance was considered by Ruskin as the constant expression of 'individual vanity and pride'.[30] This led to 'coldness, perfectness of training, incapability of emotion, want of sympathy with the weakness of lower men, blank, hopeless, haughty self-sufficiency.' [31]

Another characteristic of the Renaissance was, according to him, infidelity. He points out that whereas Gothic art was 'good for God's worship',[32] Renaissance art was 'good for man's worship'.[33] He underlines the involvement of the Church in the world, and its consequent corruption; he points out the spread of pagan ideas due to the

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[24] ibid., p. 36
[25] ibid.
[26] ibid.
[27] ibid.,vol.III,p.51
[28] ibid.,p.52
[29] ibid
[30] ibid.,p.59
[31] ibid
[32] ibid.,p.60
[33] ibid.

enthusiasm for classical literature, and to the 'misdirection of the powers of art'.[34] He writes:

> In old times, men used their powers of painting to show the objects of faith; in later times, they used the objects of faith that they may show their powers of painting.[35]

This naturally led to a lack of concern for the subject; men reached a point when

> ...sacred, profane, or sensual objects were employed, with absolute indifference, for the display of colour and execution; and gradually the mind of Europe congealed into that state of utter apathy, - inconceivable, unless it had been witnessed, and unpardonable, unless by us, who have been infected by it, - which permits us to place the Madonna and the Aphrodite side by side in our galleries, and to pass with the same unmoved inquiry into the manner of their handling, from a Bacchanal to a Nativity.[36]

All this took place

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[34] ibid.,p.106
[35] ibid., p.107
[36] ibid.

> ...upon minds enervated by luxury, and which were tempted, at the very same period, to forgetfulness or denial of all religious principle by their own basest instincts. The faith which had been undermined by the genius of Pagans, was overthrown by the crimes of Christians; and the ruin which was begun by scholarship, was completed by sensuality. The characters of the heathen divinities were as suitable to the manners of the time as their forms were agreeable to its taste; and Paganism again became, in effect, the religion of Europe.[37]

As I will point out in the next chapter, George Eliot's view of Renaissance Italy as it appears in Italy is linked in many respects to these ideas of Ruskin.

The other Victorian theoretical works concerned with Italy, though all deeply linked with Ruskin's concept and view of Italy, take a distance from him in many respects. These later works all deal with Renaissance Italy and, as I have already briefly noticed, they discuss this period in positive terms. This interest in the Italian Renaissance was common to all Europe throughout the 19th century; works and studies aiming at a description of the features of this age and its evaluation in cultural, historical, political terms were produced all over Europe. Burckardt and Michelet in the continent had provided the most noticeable contribution to the European study of the period. Certainly, most of the work in this analysis of Renaissance had been made on the continent, but in

[37] ibid., pp 107-8

the last four decades of the century the English intellectuals John Addington Symonds and Walter Pater gave life to a series of important studies on Italian cultural history, which can be regarded as representatives of the English view of Renaissance Italy. These investigations on Italian Renaissance appeared pretty late in the century; therefore, we cannot talk of their relation to George Eliot's Romola in terms of influence. Nevertheless, they provide helpful information for a thorough understanding of the cultural context George Eliot lived in.

The ideas of Symonds and Pater about the Renaissance are similar to the general view of the Renaissance which spread throughout Europe and which is still predominant; it was seen as the age of rebirth, light, freedom as opposed to the dark and narrow Middle Ages. This interest in Renaissance Italy is once again related to the intellectuals' dissatisfaction with the world they were familiar with, with contemporary England. Pater, for example, was perfectly aware of the lack of absolute values characterising his own time. It was rather the age of relativism; he believed that man's contemporary condition in the world was hopeless. Both he and Symonds proposed as a possible solution the contact with the vital Renaissance; the Ruskinian Venice was replaced by Renaissance Italy, which, therefore, was portrayed in positive terms. In the Preface to his The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry Pater gives a clear and complete example of what his, and also Symonds', view of the Renaissance consisted in. He writes that he gives to the word Renaissance

> ...a much wider scope than was intended by those who originally used it to denote only that revival of classical antiquity in the fifteenth century which was but one of many results of a general excitement and enlightening of the human mind, of which the great aim and achievement of what, as Christian art, is often falsely opposed to the Renaissance, were another result. This outbreak of the human spirit may be traced far into the middle age itself, with its qualities already clearly pronounced, the care for physical beauty, the worship of the body, the breaking down of those limits which the religious system of the middle age imposed on the art and the imagination. [38]

In this passage Walter Pater points out some very important elements in the late Victorian view of Italian Renaissance. He emphasises the fact that it was a many sided and extremely rich age which focused on the human aspect of life; that this was possible after the collapse of the strict Middle Age religious system; and he does not compare the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in terms of rupture, of strong opposition. I will start this discussion by analysing Pater and Symonds' more flexible chronological approach in comparison with Ruskin's.

The first intent of Symonds and Pater in their revaluation of the Renaissance was to overcome the strict Ruskinian view of a barrier existing between the Middle Age and

[38] W. Pater, The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry, London: Macmillan and Co, 1906, p.XII

Renaissance, as if the two historical and cultural periods were completely distinct and separated from one another to the complete disadvantage (from his point of view) of the Renaissance. Hilary Fraser notes that

> ...Ruskin had cemented the idea that a significant rupture had taken place at the end of the Middle Ages (although in his view it was a sudden and catastrophic death)... [39]

On the contrary, Symonds and Pater perceived the two periods as related to one another, they drew attention to the fact that the Renaissance had its origins in the Middle Ages, and were interested in analysing how it developed from the previous age. Symonds in his study points out that

> ...it must not be imagined that the Renaissance burst suddenly upon the world in the fifteenth century without premonitory symptoms. Far from that: within the middle age itself, over and over again, the reason strove to break loose from its fetters.[40]

He considers Abelard, who' tried to prove that the interminable dispute about entities and words was founded on a misapprehension',[41] Bacon, who, anticipating modern sciences,

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[39] H. Fraser, The Victorians and Renaissance Italy, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992, p. 233
[40] J.A. Symonds, Renaissance in Italy. The Age of the Despots, London: John Murray, 1929, p.7
[41] ibid.

maintained that man could do everything by using nature, and Joachin of Flora, who announced the coming of the Gospel of the Spirit, as prophets of the Revival. He sees in the premature civilisation of Provence, in the songs of the wandering students, the so called Carmina Burana, a reaction against the restriction imposed by ecclesiastical discipline, and a rebirth of pagan or pre-Christian feelings. Moreover, he emphasises the role played by the Emperor Frederick II, who tried to establish 'a new society of human culture' [42] in the South of Italy. All this happened within 'the very stronghold of medieval learning'.[43] Naturally, times were not yet ready; these origins of the Renaissance remained sterile within the feudal world. Then, the works of Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio, each in its own way, led Italy to the Renaissance revival of learning.

The Renaissance was for Symonds 'the liberation of the reason from a dungeon, the double discovery of the outer and the inner world'.[44] During the Middle Ages

> Beauty is a snare, pleasure a sin, the world a fleeting show, man fallen and lost, death the only certainty, judgement inevitable, hell everlasting, heaven hard to win; ignorance acceptable to God as a proof of faith and submission; abstinence and mortification are the only safe rules of life: these were the fixed ideas of the ascetic medieval Church.[45]

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[42] ibid., p.8
[43] ibid., pp. 7-8
[44] ibid., p.11

The Renaissance, instead, challenged these ideas

> ...rending the thick veil which they had drawn between the mind of man and the outer world, and flashing the light of reality upon the darkened places of his own nature. For the mystic teaching of the Church was substituted culture in the classical humanities; a new ideal was established, whereby man strove to make himself the monarch of the globe on which it is his privilege as well as destiny to live. [46]

Thus, the transition from the religious medieval culture to a culture focusing on the human element, which as we have seen was despised by Ruskin as the reason for moral degeneracy, was instead appreciated by Symonds and Pater. Symonds considered the love for classical culture, the acquisition of it, and the means used for this end as positive elements, contrarily to what Ruskin had said. Contact with classical culture led to the liberation of the intellect; therefore, 'the force to judge and the desire to create were generated'.[47] This led to the transition to the 'revelation to the consciousness of its spiritual freedom'.[48] Symonds notes that

> Not only did scholarship restore the classics and encourage literary criticism; it also restored the text of the Bible, and encouraged theological

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[45] ibid.
[46] ibid.
[47] ibid.,p.19

> criticism. In the wake of theological freedom followed a free philosophy, no longer subject to the dogmas of the Church.[49]

Therefore, for Symonds, as for Pater, the word Renaissance meant

> ...new birth to liberty - the spirit of mankind recovering consciousness and the power of self-determination, recognising the beauty of the outer world, and of the body through art, liberating the reason in science and the conscience in religion, restoring culture to the intelligence, and establishing the principle of political freedom. The Church was the school-master of the Middle Ages. Culture was the humanising and refining influence of the Renaissance.[50]

It is in this sense that they considered the dignity and centrality of humanity as the dominating aspects of the Renaissance. It is interesting in this regard that Symonds and Pater regarded Michelangelo as the character symbolising the Renaissance, because, as Pater noted, he was concerned 'almost exclusively with the creation of man'.[51] He points out that the creation of man for Michelangelo

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[48] ibid., p.20
[49] ibid.
[50] ibid., p.22
[51] W. Pater, op. cit.,p.75

> ...is not, as in the story itself, the last and crowning act of a series of developments, but the first and unique act, the creation of life itself in its supreme form, off-hand and immediately, in the cold and lifeless stone. With him the beginning of life has all the characteristics of resurrection; it is like the recovery of suspended health or animation, with its gratitude, its effusion, and eloquence.[52]

From what we have said above it is clear what Symonds and Pater meant when they said that the term Renaissance did not imply merely a rebirth of interest in classic literature, but the emancipation of reason, the resurrection of man's freedom. Their view of the period was complex; they saw it as the age of

> ...the emancipation of the reason in a race of men, intolerant of control, ready to criticise accepted canons of conduct, enthusiastic in admiration of antique liberty, freshly awakened to the sense of beauty, and anxious above all things to secure for themselves free scope in spheres outside the region of authority. [53]

This is a clear and complete definition of what the late Victorians thought about Renaissance Italy. It explains why, on the one hand, they considered the rediscovery of classical literature important in terms of liberating the intellect and invigorating it, but

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[52] ibid

why, on the other hand, they did not reduce the Renaissance to this rediscovery; why they believed that the Renaissance spirit developed from the Middle Ages, but, at the same time, they opposed the darkness and slavery of the Middle Ages to the freedom, humanism and dignity characterising the Renaissance. This period was seen by them as a mixture of contradictory elements belonging to the medieval, classical, Christian and pagan cultures, but they believed that these elements were perfectly interrelated with one another in Renaissance art. Pater pointed out the similarities existing between the Renaissance, which he called the age of Lorenzo, and the age of Pericles, in the sense that they were both ages 'productive in personalities, many-sided, centralised, complete',[54] in which artists 'do not live in isolation, but breath a common air, and catch light and heat from each other's thoughts'.[55] He writes that

> There is a spirit of general elevation and enlightenment in which all alike communicate. It is the unity of this spirit which gives unity to all the various products of the Renaissance...[56]

I think that this mixture of different elements and this culturally vital atmosphere are well portrayed in Romola, as I will explain in the next chapter. Furthermore, we will see below that this positive but complex view of the Renaissance also characterised the other Victorian novels concerned with this period.

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[53] J.A. Symonds, Renaissance in Italy.The Revival of Learning, London: John Murray, 1929, p. 10
[54] W. Pater, op. cit., p.XIV
[55] ibid.

2) Middle century Victorian Novels on Italian Subjects

Many novels concerned with Italian setting and characters were written during the middle of the century; but they are not considered interesting works of literature. Even the most famous of them, Romola, has been negatively reviewed and criticised, and is not generally believed to be George Eliot's best work, as she regarded it. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge with Kenneth Churchill that 'In the middle of the nineteenth century, however, English interest in all aspects of Italy was growing rapidly'.[57] As a proof of this widespread interest the critic points out the fact that Thomas Adolphus Trollope could market an amazing number of books dealing with Italian subjects. Thus, in a discussion about Victorian novels concerned with Italy we must acknowledge on the one hand an evident concern and growing interest with Italy, but, on the other hand, the fact that these novels are not considered valuable and noticeable works. A passage by Henry James, who was himself interested in Italy and set some of his novels there, explains the nature of the Victorian involvement in Italy; he believed these novels to give a superficial, merely picturesque portrait of Italy and its life. He writes that

> There has come to be a not unfounded mistrust of the Italian element in light literature. Italy has been made to supply so much of the easy picturesqueness, the crude local colour of poetry and the drama, that a use of this expedient is vaguely regarded as a sort of unlawful shortcut to

[56] ibid.

> success...Italians have been, from Mrs Radcliffe down, among the stock-properties of romance; their association are melodramatic, their very names are supposed to go a great way toward getting you into a credulous humour, and they are treated, as we may say, as bits of colouring matter...[58]

In this section I will pay special attention to the Victorian novels dealing with Renaissance Italy; I will examine the main features of these novels through the example of The Cloister and the Hearth by Charles Reade. This discussion is not aimed at giving a thorough reading of the novels; it rather focuses on those aspects of them useful for a more complete understanding of Romola.

In the Victorian novels on Italian subject we can notice an interest in religious subjects and polemic; apparently, the Oxford movement and the religious discussions it stimulated in England influenced the treatment of Italy in English novels. Since Mrs Sherwood's The Nun (1833), English novelists seemed to embark on a crude polemic against the Catholic Church, its evils and degeneracy. The novels dealing with this subject were numerous; the same Mrs Sherwood published The Monk of Cimies in 1837; in 1840 The Monk and the Married Woman by Julia Waddington appeared; Hawkstone: A Tale of and For England in 184- was written by William Sewell in 1845. These early novels can still be considered related with the Gothic novels; I think that the titles themselves retain

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[57] K. Churchill, Italy and English Literature 1764-1930, London: The MacMillan Press,1980, p. 135

something of the sensationalistic Gothic atmosphere. With From Oxford to Rome (1847) by Elizabeth Harris and Froude's Nemesis of Faith (1848) the situation changed in the sense that these novels no longer deal with the denunciation of the Catholic Church's evils. Nevertheless, their treatment of Italy is still linked to the clichés developed by early narrative. The facts that in Harris' novel Italy is associated with images of death and that in Froude's Nemesis of Faith the device of a journey to Italy is employed as an easy way to solve thematical difficulties are a proof of how conventional the involvement in Italy was. Novels focusing on religious problems continued to appear numerously around the middle of the century; as examples I can mention Beatrice by C. Sinclair, published in 1852; Fabiola; or the Church of the Catacombs written by Wiseman in 1855; two novels by Fullerton, Rose Leblanc (1862) and Mrs Gerald's Niece (1869); The Six Sisters of the Valleys by W. Bramley-Moore (1864). These novels all take part in the pro- and anti-Catholic debate, the novel by Wiseman, for example, is set in 302 AD and is violently anti-Catholic.

Together with this interest in religious problems, we can notice a probably stronger and wider concern with Italian history and culture, especially with the Renaissance,[59] and with Italian political events. The Italian historical and political situation was very tense in that period; Italy struggled for its independence from the *straniero,*[60] there were fights and battles and everything returned to a reactionary politics. From a novelist's point of view it

[58] H. James, Literary Reviews and Essays, Ed. A. Mordell, New York, 1957, pp. 139-41
[59] I will deal with the novels concerned with Renaissance Italy later in the chapter.

was certainly an extremely vital and lively period, ready in itself to become a fictional subject; and the political characters involved were interesting, charismatic figures who had already got in themselves some of the features of the fictional heroes. Actually, many novelists chose as the protagonists of their novels some of the contemporary Italian political figures; for instance, Garibaldi, who was well-known in England, is present in Hamilton's The Exiles of Italy (1857) and in the anonymous Angelo San Martino. A Tale of Lombardy in 1859 (1860). In fact, after the middle of the century Victorian novelists showed an interest in Italian politics. Examples of this concern are The Daltons (1852) by Charles Lever, Dr Antonio (1855) by Giovanni Ruffini, an Italian exile, and George Meredith's Sandra Belloni (1864). Dr Antonio deals with the conventional theme of the failure of a relationship between an English girl and an Italian man; nevertheless, it develops an original representation of the Italian character. Dr Antonio is not a villain, but a talented, cultivated, polite sensitive man, who is, furthermore, deeply interested in a patriotic cause. The same may be said for Meredith's treatment of his Italian heroine; he attributed to her some absolutely positive characteristics, such as artistic sensibility, devotion to the patriotic cause and sincerity, emphasising, on the contrary, the lack of them in the upper-middle-class English women she was acquainted with.

Certainly different from these novels I have briefly dealt with are Thomas Adolphus Trollope's works about Italy; Kenneth Churchill describes them as 'facile

[60] This is the Italian word for foreigner; in this peculiar historical context it generally designated the Austrians, who were politically powerful in Italy at that time.

exploitation of Italian 'local colour''.[61] His novels are valuable in this discussion because they testify to a general interest in Italy also as far as the public was concerned; as I have already said, Trollope managed to publish an 'astonishing number of books on Italian subjects...as readily as he could produce them'.[62]

In this generally superficial narrative context where the employment of Italian subjects was compared by James to 'one of those mechanical moves at chess',[63] there are some exceptions. I am referring to George Eliot's Romola, which I am going to deal with in the next chapter, and to Charles Dickens's Pictures from Italy (1846) and Little Dorrit (1857).

Pictures from Italy can be considered as belonging to that literature of travel genre for which we can find other two examples relevant to this discussion in Symonds' Sketches in Italy and Greece and D.H. Lawrence's Twilight in Italy. What is interesting and noticeable about them is the fact that these 'accounts' of the authors' journey to Italy were based on actual knowledge. In fact, Dickens spent one year in Italy and his Pictures are the literary result of his stay, like Symonds and Lawrence's works. The first thing we notice about Dickens' description of Italy is the fact that he had abandoned the Romantic sensationalism and idealism in his treatment of Italy, he seems rather interested in

[61] K. Churchill., op. cit., p. 135
[62] ibid.
[63] H. James, op.cit., p. 139

emphasising the negative aspects of the country he had visited. These are his first impressions of Genoa:

> The wonderful of everything, the unusual smells, the unaccountable filth (though it is reckoned the cleanest of Italian towns), the disorderly jumbling of dirty houses, one upon the roof of another; the passages more squalid and more close than any in St. Giles's or old Paris; in and out of which, not vagabonds, but well-dressed women, with white veils and great fans, were passing and repassing; the perfect absence of resemblance in any dwelling house, or shop, or wall, or post, or pillar, to anything one had ever seen before; and the disheartening dirt, discomfort, and decay; perfectly confounded me.[64]

Throughout his Pictures Dickens provides the reader with similar images of filthy and dirty towns; later in the account of his journey he notes:

> Much of the romance of the beautiful towns and villages on this beautiful road, disappears when they are entered, for many of them are very miserable. The streets are narrow, dark, and dirty; the inhabitants lean and squalid; and the withered old women, with their wiry grey hair twisted up into a knot on the top of the head, like a pad to carry loads on, are so

> intensely ugly, both along the Riviera, and in Genoa, too, that seen straggling about in dim doorways with their spindles, or crooning together in by-corners, they are like a population of Witches- except that they certainly are not to be suspected of brooms or any other instrument of cleanliness.[65]

It is amazing how this description of some villages in the neighbourhood of Genoa is similar to the account of Dickens' first impressions of the city itself. The description lacks specificity, it does not say anything precise about the place it deals with. Actually, it is very difficult for the reader acquainted with Italy to understand which town or village Dickens is referring to. He talks of beautiful towns and villages along a beautiful road, but he does not mention the names of these villages and towns, neither does he say why they are beautiful. He notes that the streets in these villages are narrow and dark, but he does not provide the reader with any historical or architectural reason for these qualities. The description of the old women stays there on the page without any connotation; it sounds rather cool and is not life-like. The image of these women on the doorways, which could say a lot about everyday life in an Italian village, lacks any colour. In the anonymous review published in The Times of 1846 the absence of 'life-like illustrations of character';[66] is noted. Actually, Dickens' descriptions of natives seem lifeless, they do not

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[64] C. Dickens, 'Pictures from Italy', in C. Dickens, American Notes and Pictures from Italy, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p.283

[65] ibid., p.312

[66] Anon., 'From an Unsigned Review. of *Pictures from Italy, The Times*', in Dickens. The Critical Heritage, Ed. P. Collins, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971,p. 140

convey the atmosphere one could breathe in the country in question, as an account of a journey should do. Another example of this rather cold treatment of the subject is the description of some people playing a typical game along the street:

> But the most favourite game is the national one of Mora, which they pursue with surprising ardour, and at which they will stable everything they possess. It is a destructive kind of gambling, requiring no accessories but ten fingers, which are always- I intend no pun- at hand. Two men play together. One calls a number- say the extreme one, ten. He marks what portion of it he pleases by throwing out three, or four, or five fingers; and his adversary has, in the same instant, at hazard, and without seeing his hand, to throw out as many fingers, as will make the exact balance.[67]

The description of the game, whose precise name is *morra*, is doubtless very detailed, but it does not suggest anything of the atmosphere one breathes along the streets of an Italian village, it does not say anything about the life of these villages and of their inhabitants.

The images of Italy Dickens gives in his book are so similar to one another that they seem the description of a stereotype rather than the portrait of the country. Later in the Pictures , for instance, when giving an account of one of his trips to Villa Bagnarello,

[67] C. Dickens, 'Pictures from Italy', op. cit., p. 288

near Genoa, Dickens describes the mansion with its vine covered terrace, with its little garden and with its cow-house. He notes that

> There is no pasturage near, and they [the cows] never go out, but are constantly lying down, and surfeiting themselves with vine leaves- perfect Italian cows enjoying the *dolce far niente* all day long.[68]

In this passage it seems that Dickens uses a stereotype without integrating it in the body of the description. This notation of the laziness of three cows, whose idleness is due exclusively to the absence of a pasturage nearby, seems irrelevant. The association of these cows' laziness with the nature of the Italian people seems, therefore, even less relevant, and most of all not justified.

It is important in this discussion to point out what Dickens wrote about Rome. The image of the city he provides his readers with is that of a *heap of ruins*; what he noted when he first entered the city was:

> It was no more *my* Rome: the Rome of anybody's fancy, man or boy; degraded and fallen and lying asleep in the sun among a heap of ruins: than the Place de la Concorde in Paris is. A cloudy sky, a dull cold rain, and muddy streets, I was prepared for, but not for this: and I confess to having

[68] ibid., p.286

gone to bed that night, in a very different humour, and with a very considerably quenched enthusiasm.[69]

The image becomes clearer when later in the chapter he notes:

Here was Rome indeed at last; and such a Rome as no one can imagine in its full and awful grandeur! We wandered upon the Appian Way, and then went on, through miles of ruined tombs and broken walls, with here and there a desolate and inhabited house: past the Circus of Romolus, where the course of the chariots, the stations of the judges, competitors, an spectators, are yet as plainly to be seen as in old time: past the tomb of Cecilia Metella: past all enclosure, hedge, or stak, wall or fence: away upon the open Campagna, where on that side of Rome, nothing is to be beheld but Ruin. Except where the distant Apennines bound the view upon the left, the whole wide prospect is one field of ruin. Broken aqueducts, left in the most picturesque and beautiful clusters of arches; broken temples; broken tombs. A desert of decay, sombre and desolate beyond all expression; and with a history in every stone that strews the ground.[70]

[69] ibid., p.365
[70] ibid., p.367

He gives to his readers the image of contemporary Rome as the ghost of the old city, 'haunting the very ground on which its people trod'.[71] The connotation of this image of Rome as it is provided in this book, will be clear if we analyse what Dickens thinks of the Coliseum. He notes that it is 'suggestive and distinct'.[72] He then points out that

> Its solitude, its awful beauty, and its utter desolation, strike upon the stranger the next moment, like a softened sorrow; and never in his life, perhaps, will he be so moved and overcome by any sight, not immediately connected with his own affections and afflictions. [73]

He was fascinated by the Coliseum; nevertheless, the association the sight of the building suggested to him was that of desolation, of solitude. When he noted its beauty, he pointed out that that beauty was awful.

I shall now turn to Little Dorrit. It is first of all worth noting that, on the one hand, the view of Italy provided in the novel is integrated with Little Dorrit's experience, with her feelings; on the other hand, some of the images of the country provided are typical of the picture Dickens gave in Picture of Italy. This passage clarifies what I am saying. When the character is in Venice, the reader is said:

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[71] ibid.
[72] ibid.,p.366
[73] ibid.

> The ruins of the vast old Amphitheatre, of the old Temples, of the old commemorative Arches, of the old trodden highways, of the old tombs, besides being what they were, to her, were ruins of the old Marshalsea-ruins of her old life-ruins of the faces and forms that of old peopled it- ruins of its loves, hopes, cares, and joys. two ruined spheres of action and suffering were before the solitary girl often sitting on some broken fragment; and in the lonely places, under the blue sky she saw them both together.[74]

Throughout the novel the picture of the country is often linked with the image of the prison, in this way emphasising the character's impression of being in a prison. The narrator notes that 'It appeared on the whole, to Little Dorrit herself, that this same society in which they lived, greatly resembled a superior sort of Marshalsea'.[75] And again: 'The broad stairs of his Roman palace were contracted in his failing sight to the narrow stairs of his London prison...'[76] Also the image of the ruin often occurs in the course of the narration. We read: 'While the waters of Venice and the ruins of Rome were sunning themselves for the pleasure of the Dorrit family...'.[77] And more:

> Old as these cities are, their age itself is hardly so curious, to my reflections, as that they should have been in their places all through those

[74] C. Dickens, Little Dorrit , Ed. L.Trilling, London: Oxford University Press, 1967, p.612
[75] ibid., p.511
[76] ibid., p.649

days when I did not even know of the existence of more than two or three of them, and when I scarcely knew of anything outside our old walls. There is something melancholy in it, and I don't know why. When we went to see the famous leaning tower at Pisa, it was a bright sunny day, and it and the buildings near it looked so old, and the earth and the sky looked so young, and its shadow on the ground was so soft and retired! I could not at first think how beautiful it was, or how curious, but I thought 'O how many times when the shadow of the wall was falling on our room, and when that weary tread of feet was going up and down the yard- O how many times this place was just as quiet and lovely as it is to-day!' It quite overpowered me. My heart was so full, that tears burst out of my eyes, though I did what I could to restraint them. And I have the same feeling often - often.[78]

Another familiar image the reader will find in the course of the novel is that of the dirtiness of the towns; an example is given by this passage:

The period of the family's stay at Venice came, in its course, to an end, and they moved, with their retinue, to Rome. Through a repetition of the former Italian scenes, growing more dirty and more haggard as they went

[77] ibid., p.514
[78] ibid.,p.554

on, and bringing them at length to where the very air was diseased, they passed to their destination. [79]

After what we have noted about the picture of Italy provided in Little Dorrit, we can conclude that Dickens' treatment of Italy is valuable as far as he integrated the image of Italy he wanted to convey to his readers with the feelings of the main character. It is what George Eliot did in Middlemarch and in Romola, by connecting the picture of Italy with respectively Dorothea's and Romola's experiences.

I have briefly mentioned the fact that during the Victorian age novels that can be described as historical novels were produced; most of them deal with Renaissance Italy and were written before Romola. I can mention as examples John Richard Best's The Pope (1840); Leonora d'Orco by G. P. R. James (1857); The Cloister and The Hearth by Charles Reade (1861); Swinburne's The Chronicle of Tebaldeo Tebaldei (1863); J. Henry Shorthouse's John Inglesant: a Romance (1880). I will take The Cloister and the Hearth as an example of this genre, and I will analyse the main features of this novel, whose analysis will be useful for a better understanding of Romola.

One of the chief characteristics of The Cloister and the Hearth, as of all these novels, is an oscillating interest between historical account and fiction. The novelists' focus oscillates between these two poles, and in these novels there are structural and

[79] ibid., p.511

thematic elements belonging to both fields. Reade was much concerned with the attempt at being historical, though the fictional aspect in his novel is strong, as we will see below. In this respect, one structural characteristic of the novel is the employment of a framing device, whose aim was to give the story historical credibility. As Manzoni had done in I Promessi Sposi,[80] whose story he pretended was based on a seventeenth-century manuscript, so Charles Reade had his narrator decipher a chronicle written in Latin. In Chapter I the narrator explains that

> There is a musty chronicle, written in intolerable Latin, and in it a chapter where every sentence holds a fact. Here is told, with harsh brevity, the strange history of a pair, who lived untrumpeted, and died unsung, four hundred years ago; and it lie now, as unpitied, in that stern page, as fossils in a rock.[81]

Thus the whole story is pretended to be based on a manuscript, which lays a claim to its verisimilitude. The narrator's task is to 'show what lies below that dry chronicler's words.' [82] The same device is employed in the other novels. In The Chronicle of Tebaldeo Tebaldei Swinburne pretended that the story was written by Lucretia Borgia's servant and lover. The protagonist of John Inglesant: a Romance, after being told by a priest some elements of the story of John Inglesant, decides to reconstruct it by going through some

[80] Translated in English as The Betrothal.
[81] C. Reade, The Cloister and the Hearth, London: J.M. Dent & Co, 1907, p.15
[82] ibid.

papers he found in the library. George Eliot in Romola made the ghost of a Florentine lived in the 14th century talk for the authenticity of her description of the city.

In the passage from Reade's novel I have quoted above it is said that the story happened four hundred years ago; in the following sentence the narrator specifies the exact period of the story:

> It was the past the middle of the fifteenth century; Louis XI was sovereign of France; Edward IV was wrongful king of England; and Philip "the Good", having by force and cunning dispossessed his cousin Jacqueline, and broken her heart, reigned undisturbed this many years in Holland, where our tale begins.[83]

At the beginning of the narration, thus, the reader is informed of the time when the story takes place, of the place where it is first set, and of the nature of the characters, who are said to be common persons. Other devices are employed to make the reader aware of the historical intentions of the novelist. For instance, the main character, Gerard, is a scribe; the illustrative techniques he uses for his work are represented in the novel. In a letter to his family, for example, he draws two clasped hands, meaning farewell, and this drawing appears on the novel's page.[84]

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[83] ibid., p.16

However, one cannot fail to notice the fictional aspect of the novel. A number of fictional devices have been employed in order to make the story flow. The *resurrection theme* is a clear example of what I am saying. Throughout the novel characters who have died appear miraculously to be alive. Gerard, for example, is believed by his friends Andrea and Pietro to have died drowned in the Tiber. In fact, Gerard has written a message to them announcing his intentions to commit suicide. The two friends look in vain for the body. The chapter concerned with the search ends with the words: 'My pretty lad...say a mass for thy friend's soul: for he is not among living men'.[85] But the reader finds him alive in a convent, where he decides to embrace the ecclesiastical life. We are told: 'And Gerard, carried from the Tiber into that convent a suicide, now passed for a young saint within its walls'.[86] Furthermore, in the novel there is a significant number of coincidences and misfortunes. The chief example is the employment of the letter device used to part the lovers. Gerard's parents send him a letter making him believe that his beloved Margaret is dead; what happens next in the story is the consequence of this false information and of the misunderstandings it caused.

The story is set partly in Holland and partly in Italy. It may be assumed that the two countries represent the two poles of a dichotomy, but the symbolic meaning of this polarisation is not easy to decipher. It is certainly worth noticing the fact that the male character starts a journey from the North of Europe to the South in order to solve his

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[84] ibid., p.317
[85] ibid., p.503
[86] ibid., p.512

financial and romantic problems. However, I do not think that it would be completely right to assume that Italy is represented as the country where love dreams are realised, since it is in Italy that Gerard receives the letter about Margaret's false death. It is in that country that he finds the suitable context for a wicked life, and it is there that he decides to leave the external world for the religious one. Neither can we say that Reade employed the theme of Italy as the country where characters find sorrow and death, as it happens to Little Dorrit for instance, because the false tragic news of Margaret's death comes from Holland.

Actually, the picture of 15th century Italy Reade gives in the novel is complex. On the one hand, the narrator focuses on the cultural liveliness of the period; on the other hand, he emphasises the lascivious, corrupt environment Gerard finds in Rome. When Gerard finds himself in trouble in Holland both with the authorities and his family, and has to solve these problems in order to live with his beloved, Margaret Van Eick, his mentor, advises him to go to Italy. This is the conversation they have:

> "There is a country, Gerard, where certain fortune awaits you at this moment. Here the arts freeze, but there they flourish, as they never yet flourished in any age or land."
>
> "It is Italy !" cried Gerard. "It is Italy !"
>
> " Ay Italy ! where painters are honoured like princes and scribes are paid three hundred crowns for copying a single manuscript. Know you not that the Holiness the Pope has written to every land for skilful scribes to copy

the hundred of precious manuscript that are pouring into that favoured land from Costantinople, whence learning and learned men are driven by the barbarous Turks?"

"Nay, I know not that; but it has been the dream and the hope of my life to visit Italy, the queen of all arts..." [87]

This is the first image of Renaissance Italy the reader is provided with; it is first of all represented as a culturally rich country, where Gerard's abilities as a scribe will be appreciated. The narrator notes that Gerard

...was reconciled to leaving Margaret only by his desire to visit Italy, and his strong conviction that there he should earn money and reputation, and remove every obstacle to their marriage.[88]

The first persons Gerard meets in Italy are a woman with a child and a friar, whom he meets on the ship to Rome. Of the woman Gerard notices that

...sixteen hundred years had not tainted the old Roman blood in her veins; and the instinct of a race she had perhaps scarcely heard of taught her to die with decent dignity.[89]

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[87] ibid., p.73
[88] ibid., p.94
[89] ibid., p.426

The narrator points out:

> Thus, even here, two were found who maintained the dignity of our race: a woman, tender, yet heroic, and a monk, steeled by religion against mortal fears.[90]

Through these first encounters the narrator underlines the link between Renaissance Italy and the Roman, classical past. Besides, the image of the friar is important because in the course of the novel the reader is provided with images of the Church's corruption and degeneracy. The connection between the Renaissance present and the classical past is implied throughout the novel; Gerard himself is a scribe; his work, therefore, puts him in constant connection with the past. When introducing the character of Fra Colonna, who employs Gerard, the narrator emphasises as the main feature of the contemporary cultural context the revival of classical learning. He says:

> The true revivers of ancient learning and philosophy were two writers of fiction- Petrarch and Boccaccio. Their labours were not crowned with great public and immediate success; but they sowed the good seed; and it never perished, but quickened in the soil, awaiting sunshine. From their day Italy was never without a native scholar or two, versed in Greek; and each learned Greek who landed there was received fraternally. The fourteenth

[90] ibid., p.427

century, ere its close, saw the birth of Poggio, Valla, and the elder Guarino; and early in the fifteenth Florence under Cosmo de Medici was a nest of Platonists. These, headed by Gemistus Pletho, a born Greek, began about A.D. 1440 to write down Aristotle.[91]

The element of Renaissance culture Reade emphasises in his picture is the re-birth of interest in classical cultures. Fra Colonna himself is a humanist like Eliot's Bardo de Bardi; he is obsessed by the glories of classical world, and explicitly draws a connection between contemporary and ancient Rome. He says to Gerard while walking with him:

" This place Rome? It is but the tomb of mighty Rome." He showed Gerard that twenty or thirty feet of the old triumphal arches were underground, and that the modern streets ran over ancient palaces, and over the tops of columns; and coupling this with the comparatively narrow limits of the modern city and the gigantic vestiges of antiquity that peeped above ground here and there, he uttered a somewhat remarkable simile. " I tell thee this village they call Rome is but as one of those swallows' nests ye shall see built on the eaves of a decayed abbey." [92]

This love for the ancient world brings with it a mixture of Pagan and Christian elements. Fra Colonna is a religious figure, and, at the same time he is deeply interested in

[91] ibid., p.450

classical culture. The mixture is evident also when Gerard has a conversation with the Pope. The Pope himself is interested in Plutarch and appreciates his work; furthermore he draws an interesting comparison between the Greek author and Boccaccio. He says:

> "An excellent narrator, capitano, and writeth exquisite Italian. But in spirit a thought too monotonous. Monks and nuns were never all unchaste: one or two such stories were right pleasant and diverting; but five score paint his time falsely and sadden the heart of such as love of mankind. Moreover, he hath no skill at characters. Now this Greek is supreme in that art: he carved them with pen; and turning his page, see into how real and great a world we enter of war, and policy, and business, and love in its own place: for with him, as in the great world, men are not all running after a wench. With this great open field compare me not the narrow garden of Boccaccio, and his little mill-round of dishonest pleasures." [93]

It is certainly worth noticing the fact that the Pope likes Plutarch, who is a Greek author, therefore a representative of the ancient Pagan culture, and that he had read Boccaccio. When talking of the Italian author, the Pope points out the picture he gave of the Church's corruption and of human pleasures. Furthermore, Reade represents the degeneracy characterising the Renaissance world. When describing a dinner among religious figures like Fra Colonna and Cardinal Bessarion, the narrator notes the richness of the table; he

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[92] ibid., p. 455-6

talks of 'roast pheasants dished up with all their feathers',[94] of 'chickens cooked in bottles, and tender as peaches', [95] and notes the 'napkins, surpassingly fine, and folded into cocked hats and birds' wings, and fans, etc., instead of lying flat'.[96] He points out:

> As soon as the ladies had disported themselves among the sugar plums, the tables were suddenly removed, and the guests sat in a row against the wall. Then came in, ducking and scraping, two ecclesiastics with lutes, and kneeled at the cardinal's feet and there sang the service of the day; then retired with a deep obeisance: in answer to which the cardinal fingered his skull cap as our late Iron Duke his hat: the company dispersed, and Gerard had dined with a cardinal and one that had thrice just missed being pope.[97]

From what I noticed so far about the novel, it seems clear that the picture of Renaissance Italy provided by Reade in his novel is complex; it does not emphasise a single element of the period, but tries to represent the truest nature of that many-sided epoch. We will see in the next chapter that the view of the Renaissance that George Eliot offers in Romola is similarly composite.

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[93] ibid., p.466
[94] ibid., p.452
[95] ibid.
[96] ibid., p.453
[97] ibid.

3) Novels about Italy after Romola

There is certainly a recognisable link, or rather a continuity, between late 19th century novels on Italian subjects and Symonds and Pater's theoretical writings. The leitmotiv of these novels is the vision of Italy as the southern country where the pagan past, still vital and alive in the manifestations of contemporary life, has made possible a true enjoyment of life. This connection between modern Italy and its pagan past, recognised also by Symonds and Pater, is a basic theme in these novels. That dissatisfaction with contemporary England which was felt, as we have seen, by Ruskin and by the other two theoretical writers can be also found, though implicitly, in the novels about Renaissance Italy I have just discussed. This feeling becomes stronger and stronger in the later novelists, who pointed out the mechanical, and therefore sterile, insensitive condition of contemporary England. Ouida,[98] whose novels are often criticised as superficial and sentimental, can be nevertheless considered the forerunner of this picture of Italy as the place which has a special attraction to the Northerner. All the novelists after her advised their readers to 'italianize themselves' (Norman Douglas used the term 'Mediterranise'); they saw in Italy, in its relation with the pagan past, the solution to the negative condition of their contemporary world. The novelist I will discuss in order to show which kind of picture of Italy is provided in the novels published after Romola is E.M. Forster.

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[98] She is a late 19th century novelist (1839-1908) who showed a strong interest in Italy. She spent some time there and she set there her fictional works. I have also knowledge of an article written by her on Gabriele D'Annunzio ('The Genius of D'Annunzio' The Fortnightly Review, vol. LXI,n.15,1897).

Forster's treatment of Italy suggests the existence of an opposition between the civilised North and the more passionate, deep South. In fact, the novelist pointed out the fact that an advanced society like the English one lacked profound passions, which were, according to him, central to a true enjoyment of life. On the contrary, most elementary ways of life, such as the Italian and the Indian, were characterised by the presence of deep passions.

The idea that the achievement of a full, passionate, profound enjoyment of life is essential for the complete, total growing of the individual is clearly represented in A Room with a View. Her stay in Florence makes Lucy experience a true enjoyment of life, which is in total contrast with the life-style in which she had been brought up. It is there that she meets George Emerson, the man she eventually marries. The book is made up of a part set in Italy and of a longer part set in Surrey; therefore, it is the novel's structure itself which underlines the contrast between North and South. Though more than half of the story takes place in England, it is during and thanks to her stay in Italy that Lucy understands what reality is, beyond the hypocrisies and falsities of her own middle-class world. This is well pointed out by Rose Macaulay, who writes that

> ...the English drama is played against this background [Italy], before an audience who know that *Italian petimus*, and that, until we return there we shall be living in a foolish mental fog... [99]

Lucy is firstly imprisoned in this fog of social conventions, in this 'muddle', as Forster often wrote. The nature of this foggy world is well brought about by Miss Bartlett's decision to assign to Lucy the room which previously belonged to old Mr Emerson, though it is smaller than the young Mr Emerson's one. The narrator records that

> Miss Bartlett only sighed, and enveloped her in a protective embrace as she wished her good night. It gave Lucy the sensation of a fog, and when she reached her own room she opened the window and breathed the clean night air, thinking of the kind old man who had enabled her to see the lights dancing in the Arno and the cypressis of San Miniato, and the foot - hills of the Apennines, black against the rising moon [100]

On the contrary, Miss Bartlett in her room 'fastened the window-shutters and locked the door.'[101]

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[99] R. Macaulay, The Writings of E. M. Forster London: The Hogarth Press, 1970, p. 78
[100] E.M. Forster, A Room with a View, London: Penguin Books, 1976, p. 18
[101] ibid.

In Santa Croce Lucy's first experience of Italy, without Baedeker, begins; it runs parallel with her discovery of reality. Her first impression of Santa Croce clearly shows how her view of things is vitiated by what Forster described as the muddle characterising Miss Bartlett's world and the world Lucy knows up to now:

> Of course, it must be a wonderful building. But how like a barn! And how very cold! Of course, it contains frescoes by Giotto, in the presence of whose tactile values she was capable of feeling what was proper. But who was to tell her which they were? She walked about disdainfully, unwillingly to be enthusiastic over monuments of uncertain authorship or date. There was no one even to tell her which, of all the sepulchral slabs that paved the nave and transepts, was the one that had been most praised by Mr Ruskin.[102]

There is an evident conflict in Lucy between spontaneous feelings and feelings imposed by convention. 'The pernicious charm of Italy'[103] starts to work on her. She recognises the tourists' noses 'as red as their Baedekers',[104] she is starting to find a connection between her bookish ideas and her experience. And she finds in Santa Croce the persons who bring her through the second stage of her initiation in real, natural life, the Emersons. Her tour in the church with them represents an important moment in Lucy's *Bildung*, in her

[102] ibid., p. 25
[103] ibid.
[104] ibid.

discovery of reality. But when Miss Bartlett reaches them, we see Lucy once again torn between sense of social conventions, of propriety, and spontaneousness, naturalness. It is Miss Bartlett who takes Lucy back to the foggy world; as it is she, later in the novel, who symbolically takes her away from the wonderful view of the Tuscan countryside after George has kissed her on the day of the picnic.

Before this crucial moment, there is another experience of the true world Lucy must undergo. In the Piazza Signoria she sees an Italian being murdered, she faints in George's arm, her pictures are stained by blood and George throws them away in the Arno while they walk along the river. This is an important and symbolic moment in Lucy's growth. Forster makes her experience that complex world of reality, which is characterised also by violence, from which her 'sheltered upbringing'[105] has always protected her. She has gone to Italy eager to appreciate Giotto's tactile values, to buy artistic pictures and instead she is brought into contact with the complexity of life. The blood on the pictures she has bought clearly conveys a symbolic meaning. It underlines the contrast between the foggy, muddy world Lucy was brought up in, and the necessity for her who can play the piano with ardour and passion to receive an initiation into real life. The blood clearly shows how different and distant from reality is that world which valued convention, propriety as the most important aspects of life.

[105] R. Macaulay,op. cit., p. 46

Lucy is now ready for the last important stage of her Italian initiation. She is driven to the place where her Italian *Bildung* ends by an Italian coachman (therefore, a person belonging to that elemental world Italy, and later India, symbolises for Forster). This coachman and his girlfriend (both assimilated to the mythological world as Phaeton and Persephone) show signs of their love for one another spontaneously and naturally. The spoke-persons for the foggy world strongly despise and condemn this behaviour. During the picnic two Italian peasants brings Lucy by misunderstanding into George Emerson's arms. It is once again Miss Bartlett who brings Lucy away from George, from the wonderful view of the Italian countryside open before her eyes, but she can not bring her back to the foggy world of conventionality for good. The contact with what Italy represented, the initiation into the real world of naturalness has started to clear up the fog and Lucy eventually marries George Emerson. The last scene of the novel takes place in Florence, with the two characters looking out from a window;

> Youth enwrapped them; the song of Phaeton announced passion requited, love attained. But they were conscious of a love more mysterious than this. The song died away; they heard the river, bearing down the snows of winter into the Mediterranean. [106]

This fascinating ending of A Room with a View provides the reader with food for thought. It is as if the author questioned George and Lucy's attained happiness, as if he

[106] E.M. Forster, op. cit., p.223

felt that there were still something missing. Also the meaning of the final mention of the Mediterranean, interesting to our discussion, is not straightforward; the association with the winter and the snow is extremely fascinating, but, at the same time, it sounds like a warning to the elemental world of deep, passionate forces.

4) D.H. Lawrence's View of Italy

The last stage of this discussion about Victorian and post-Victorian view of Italy may well end with an analysis of Lawrence's treatment of this country, as representing the final development of that attitude towards Italy.

Lawrence's concern with Italy also has its origins in the author's discontent with contemporary English life; Churchill maintains that '...Lawrence's characteristic beliefs owed to his initial contact with rural Italian life and his contrasting of it with the life he knew in England'.[107] The life he knew in England was the mechanical, industrial oriented life, characterised by a loss of absolutes and a growth of relativism and alienation characterising the life of the individual. What he found in Italy, on the other hand, was the fact that 'The people are so unconscious. They only feel and want, they don't know. We know too much. No, we only *think* we know such a lot'.[108] In the same letter he exposed

[107] K. Churchill, op. cit., p. 190
[108] D.H. Lawrence,'To Ernest Collings, 17 January 1913', in The Letters of D.H. Lawrence, Ed. J.T. Boulton, vol.1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.504

what his main belief was, a belief which was related to the contrast he recognised between the Italian peasants' life and English life. He wrote:

> My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says is always true.[109]

He developed this central belief in the collection of essays gathered under the title Twilight in Italy, which were the literary results of his stay in Italy on Lake Garda in 1912. Therefore, this work is related to Dickens' Pictures from Italy, to Symonds' Sketches in Italy and Greece as belonging to the genre of the literature of travel. As I have briefly said, Lawrence's idea of the function Italy had when brought into contact with England was generally similar, or at least stemmed from the same feelings and needs, to that of Symonds; what we must look into is how he developed his own peculiar attitude towards Italy.

In 'The Spinner and the Monks', the first of the essays constituting Twilight in Italy to be set in Italy, he transforms a banal encounter between a foreigner and a native peasant, and then with some monks, into a reflection on the differences between the northern and the southern attitude towards life. In the following essay 'The Lemon Gardens' this reflection becomes a discussion on the contrast between the Renaissance and

[109] ibid., p. 503

the Middle Age views of life, which is naturally extremely interesting to our discussion. The spinner is associated by Lawrence with the image of the eagle, which in the author's imagery represents the senses, the Renaissance and God the father, and is opposed to the monks, who are associated instead with the image of the dove representing the spirit, the Middle Ages and Christ. This duality is analysed throughout the book and certainly stands for the dichotomy between the northern and southern nature. The first impression Lawrence has when he first sees the spinner is the sensation of being entirely unnoticed. She makes him feel as if he 'were not in existence'; [110] she is 'unobserved and unobserving',[111] 'she took no notice'[112] of him, he feels himself 'wrong, false, an outsider',[113] he is to her 'merely a transient circumstance, a man, part of the surroundings',[114] 'a piece of the environment'.[115] Actually, what strikes Lawrence is the wholeness of this human being. He writes that

> Her world was clear and absolute, without consciousness of self. She was not self-conscious, because she was not aware that there was anything in the universe except *her* universe. In her universe I was a stranger, a foreign *signore*. That I had a world of my own, other than her own, was not conceived by her. She did not care. [116]

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[110] D.H. Lawrence, Twilight in Italy and Other Essays, Ed. Paul Eggert, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 105
[111] ibid, p. 106
[112] ibid, p. 107
[113] ibid.
[114] ibid.
[115] ibid.
[116] ibid.

As the day goes by, and the sunset and the moon are visible, the old spinner disappears; in fact, she was 'all day-sunshine',[117] and she 'would have none of the moon'.[118] In the moonlight she does not belong to Lawrence realises the partiality of her nature, of her self-sufficiency. He notes that 'She did not know the yielding up of the senses and the possession of the unknown, through the senses, which happens under a superb moon'.[119] Similarly, the monks he sees passing by are considered by him an example of abnegation, of spirituality which does not accept the passionate side of life. What the individual must aim at in order to achieve completeness, thorough maturity is a balance, an acceptance of both elements. At the end of this essay he wonders

> Where is the transcendent knowledge in our hearts, uniting sun and darkness, day and night, spirit and senses? Why do we not know that the two in consummation are one; that each is only part; partial and alone for ever; but that the two in consummation are perfect, beyond the range of loneliness or solitude ? [120]

This theme is developed also in the following essay 'The Lemon Gardens'. Here, as often in Lawrence, the reflection originates from a trivial event in the everyday life at Gargnano. Signor di Paoli has asked him a help in fixing a door-spring. This request of

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[117] ibid., p. 112
[118] ibid.
[119] ibid., p. 113

help implies that the Northerner is able to handle a practical, mechanical situation and gives rise to a reflection about the differences between the northern and the southern attitude towards life, differences which find their origin in the Renaissance. Like Symonds and Pater, Lawrence saw in the Renaissance 'the divinity of the flesh, and the absoluteness of its laws',[121] while the Middle Ages seemed to him to have been striving 'towards the self-abnegation and the abstraction of Christ'.[122] Whereas Italy, according to Lawrence, has been characterised by this adoration of the flesh since the Renaissance, and still is, the north, England was associated with the power of the mind. What he recognised as a fault in both attitudes to life was that same self-sufficiency leading to partiality which he had noticed about the old spinner. Each attitude to life was seen as incapable of integrating itself with the other side of life; therefore, '...the Italian through centuries has avoided our Northern purposive industry, because it has seemed to him a form of nothingness'.[123] The reason why 'Northern purposive industry' seems to the Italian 'nothingness' is that industry is something beyond him, something which is not him. And the same has happened to the Northerner the other way round, the Northerner who worships 'the mechanised force'. Lawrence writes:

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[120] ibid.
[121] ibid., p. 116
[122] ibid.
[123] ibid.,p. 117

> So on we go, active in science and mechanics, and social reform. But we have exhausted ourselves in the process. We have found great treasures, and we are now impotent to use them. [124]

What Lawrence points out, in line with the previous treatment of Italy I have analysed, is that England has lost contact with both infinites, while the Italians at least still retain contact with one infinite. But in the 'Lemon Gardens' Lawrence seems to foresee the decay Italy is about to go through. In fact, Di Paoli wants to introduce machinery, 'But he is too old. It remains for the young Italian to embrace his mistress, the machine'.[125]

These ideas have naturally affected the development of Lawrence's fiction. Both The Rainbow and Women in Love emphasise the ugly industrial face of England, the terrifying aspects of industrialism, and the difficulties of establishing human relationships, as he still hoped when he wrote Twilight in Italy. In The Lost Girl, Kangaroo, The Virgin and the Gypsy and On Coming Home Lawrence employs the image of the long ash-grey coffin to describe the English coast, and contrasts it with the beauty of Italy. However, in Aaron's Rod he makes the prediction which concluded 'The Lemon Gardens' concrete. The protagonist, Lily, in fact, feels the desire to go to another continent, because the whole of Europe was becoming too narrow. Going to other continents was what Lawrence decided to do after he experienced life in Sardinia. Thus, the prediction of 'The Lemon Gardens' became true; Lawrence realised that even the South, Italy, was being

[124] ibid., p. 125

spoiled by mechanisation and industrialism. He afterwards abandoned the other continents and went back to Italy with his works, but to a no longer existing Italy, to the country of the Etruscans, whose civilisation had realised, according to him, the fullness of life he strove for.

I cannot conclude this brief discussion about Lawrence's concern with Italy without remembering that his interest in Italy was also literary. During his stay in Taormina in 1921 he became acquainted with the art of Giovanni Verga. He translated Mastro don Gesualdo, Vita dei Campi, Novelle Rusticane and wrote some essays about the Italian author.[126] Lawrence considered Verga the greatest Italian writer of the period, nevertheless he pointed out some aspects of his art which he considered defects. He was acute in noticing a difference in Verga's fiction between an earlier period, during which he dealt with the fashionable bourgeois world, and a later period, which was characterised by the author's concern with the Sicilian world he was so familiar with. Lawrence pointed out the importance of this change of subject in Verga's art and believed that Verga's masterpieces were the novels set in Sicily. These novels, Lawrence noticed, originate from the observation of a world Verga intimately knew and deal with common people living in a world extremely distant from the sophisticated world. The English writer appreciated this aspect of Verga's art. When he discussed the two novels, I Malavoglia and Mastro Don Gesualdo, he pointed out that they can be considered masterpieces, but that the reader

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[125] ibid, p. 131

must make allowances for the exaggerated feeling of piety Verga shows towards his humble characters, which happens especially in I Malavoglia. The other defect Lawrence noticed in his discussion about the two novels is the objectivity Verga shows in his representation of the world. When discussing Mastro Don Gesualdo, Lawrence emphasised the absence of insight into the characters' souls. Mastro don Gesualdo does not express his feelings; the reader does not know how he feels in the most crucial moments of his life. Furthermore, at this regard Lawrence complained about the absence of transitional passages which would help the reader to understand better some aspects of the plot and the characters' responses to events. He links this attitude of Verga with the fact that the writer borrowed the French realistic criteria. He talks of borrowing since he believed that those principles were not Verga's; what the Italian author did was accepting something foreign to his cultural background. The other explanation Lawrence gave for this lack of subjectivity is the Southern nature of Verga. He pointed out that the Southern environment with its beautiful landscapes, with its warm weather, with the sun leads the individual to care for the external and not for the internal world. The objection an Italian reader of these essays will naturally move to Lawrence's criticism is that the lack of subjectivity in Verga's novels is due exclusively to the Italian author approach to literature. As I have noticed in the previous chapter, his aim as a writer was to provide the reader with a truthful representation of the world he had chosen to portray, with what this meant in terms of narrative technique. His purpose was to write novels in which the

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[126] Lawrence's essays about Verga can be found in Phoenix.The PosthumousPapers of D. H. Lawrence, Ed. E. D. McDonald, London: Heinemann, 1961 and in Phoenix II. Uncollected, Unpublished and Other Prose Works by D. H. Lawrence, Ed. W. Roberts and H. T. Moore, London: Heinemann, 1968

presence of the author was not visible. This is the reason why he did not allow his characters to express their own feelings, nor his narrator to interfere in the course of the narration to throw a light on the characters' personalities.

In conclusion, we can say that the Victorian interest in Italy generally stemmed from a discontent the intellectuals felt with contemporary England. They emphasised the negative aspects of the growing industrialism characterising England and hoped that a contact with Italy, whether the contemporary or the past one, could improve their country's condition. Ruskin, Pater and Symonds in their works expressed the hope that the example of the greatness of the Italian past could re-awaken the English consciousness. Whereas the former regarded the Middle Ages as the period to emulate, and sharply criticised, as we have noted, the Renaissance; the later writers emphasised the positive aspects of the Renaissance. They gave a positive but complex picture of the period, focusing on its cultural richness. Victorian novels about Renaissance Italy, which also include Romola, provide their readers with a similarly complex view of the period. The novelists aimed at a historically detailed description of the epoch. The aspects of it they mostly dealt with were the importance assigned to culture, the vitality of the cultural context, but also the corruption characterising the period. Late-Victorian novelists concerned with Italy and the early 20th century ones gave a picture of the country as the symbol of the southern world, which represented for them the unspoiled, uncontaminated world, or the world of the pagan enjoyment of life. Forster and Lawrence hoped for a 'mediterranisation' of the North, in a contact between the North and the South, so that the

Northerner could benefit from southern vitality and lose the sterility, the vulgarity typical of the world he knew. However, they had to acknowledge the impossibility of the fulfilling their dreams, since even Italy, even the South, was going to be spoiled by the new age's gods. The development of Lawrence's view of Italy summarises the development we have acknowledged in the Victorian and post Victorian treatment of Italy as a parabola

> '...through successive attempts to fertilise modern England with qualities which were felt to have been lost there but still to be available in Italy, to the increasing realisation of the tragic impossibility of such an aim'.[126]

[126] K. Churchill.,op. cit., p. 195

IV. George Eliot's Picture of Renaissance Italy as it appears in Romola

In his famous review of Romola, which George Eliot thought had fully underlined what her aim was when portraying the main characters and relating them to the Florentine context,[1] R.H. Hutton points out that

> The great artistic purpose of the story is to trace out the conflict between liberal culture and the more passionate form of the Christian faith in that strange era, which has so many points of resemblance with the present, when the two in their most characteristic forms struggled for the pre-eminence over Florentines who had been educated into the half-pedantic and half-idealistic scholarship of Lorenzo de Medici, who faintly shared the new scientific impulses of the age of Columbus and Copernicus, and whose hearts and consciences were stirred by the preaching, political as well as spiritual, of one of the very greatest as well as earliest of the reformers - the Dominican Savonarola.[2]

[1] See George Eliot's letter to Richard Hutton, 8 August 1863, in George Eliot's Letters, Ed. G.S. Haight, vol.IV,1862-1866,pp.96-97

[2] R.H. Hutton,'Review',The Spectator,1863, in George Eliot and her Readers. A Selection of Contemporary Reviews, Ed.J. Holmstrom and L. Lerner, London: The Bodley Head,1966,p.57

In the course of the novel George Eliot actually emphasises the conflict between Christian values, stemming from the Middle Ages, and pagan values, linked with the humanistic and Renaissance historical and cultural context. She symbolises this contrast with the characters of Savonarola and Tito, or , from a historical point of view, with the figures of Savonarola, again, and of Lorenzo de Medici. Nevertheless, one cannot summarise the theme and meaning of the novel only by saying that it deals with this contrast; in focusing on it, in fact, the novel shows a great complexity in the description of the historical and cultural context, of the characters, and in the development of that ethical issue which is the basis of the story itself. On the one hand, the novelist was aware of the richness and complexity of the period she was dealing with. In fact, she populated the novel with characters each representing a peculiar aspect of it. Bardo and Baldassarre, for instance, represent the humanistic tradition, or better the old generation of humanists; Tito represents the new Renaissance man, his Greek origins underlining the link existing between 15^{h} century Florence and the classical world; Piero di Cosimo represents the artist; Nello and his shop seem to point out the extreme cultural liveliness characterising Florence at that time; Savonarola, his sermons, and his large audience represent the Christian, religious element present in Florentine Renaissance. On the other hand, however, George Eliot emphasises the moral degeneracy, the lasciviousness, the corruption characterising this period. She does so by means of narratorial comments. In one of these, as we will see, she gives a picture of the Renaissance similar to Ruskin's. As he had done, she emphasises those negative features of Renaissance Florence and she describes the cultural richness as a counterbalance of that amoral situation. The other

means she employs in order to underline the degeneracy characterising 15th century Florence is to describe Tito as a negative character, his story pointing out how that context and the values it expressed led to a wrong behaviour. The historical and cultural picture the novelist gives of the period is carefully researched, truthful and well informed, but she used it as the setting for the ethical search for values which is implied in Romola's story. This fact brought her to give a view of Italian Renaissance focusing, as I have noticed, on its complexity, thus anticipating the ideas of Symonds and Pater, but also on its corruption and degeneracy, in a way which reminds us of Ruskin's view of the period. David J. Delaura, in drawing a comparison between George Eliot's Romola and Pater's Marius The Epicurean, points out '...each sought a self-transcending ethic, drawing on Christian feeling but resolutely secular in content'.[3]

What the novel is deeply concerned with is, in fact, this moral search. This discussion is aimed at understanding in what way George Eliot described the particular Italian setting she had chosen, and which features of it she emphasised. Therefore, in this chapter I will deal with the analysis of the historical and cultural picture George Eliot gave of Florence at the close of 15th century, and by an analysis of the description and development of the main characters.

[3] D.J. Delaura, 'Romola and the Origin of the Paterian View of Life', Nineteenth-Century Fiction, vol. 21,1966-67,p.23

1) The Historical Picture of Renaissance Florence

The choice of the period from 1492 to 1498 as the setting of Romola is symptomatic of the fact that in the novel George Eliot emphasised the complexity, and the unstable political character of the period.

The two dates, in fact, are very important; 1492 is the year of Lorenzo de Medici's death, and 1498 is the year of Savonarola's death. It goes without saying that Lorenzo's death brought with it (though it was not the only cause) the end of the political stability his policy had made possible, and the beginning of a politically difficult period. Piero de Medici, who followed him in the government of Florence, was not able to maintain that balanced state of alliances Lorenzo had created, and Florence witnessed the expulsion of the Medici, the coming of Charles VIII, and the establishment of the Republic by Savonarola. In other words, George Eliot describes in detail the main stages of Florentine politics at the time of the story, showing how uncertain the political situation of Italy was. The country was divided into many states, none of which was able to impose its own supremacy over the others, and was becoming the prey of foreign European states. The two historical characters who represented the chronological poles of the novel, Lorenzo and Savonarola, can also be considered the two opposite poles of the dichotomy between the pagan, Renaissance element of Florentine historical and cultural context, and the religious, medieval one. As Dorothea Barrett points out

> Savonarola was Lorenzo's antithesis in every respect: whereas the former stood for popular government, the latter stood for autocracy; the former was the embodiment of medieval religious austerity, the latter the embodiment of Renaissance humanism; Lorenzo the autocrat paid poets to write, Savonarola the representative of the people burned books on his Bonfire of Vanities.[4]

Throughout the novel the reader is provided with a detailed picture of the historical background; in fact, the novel begins with a long and careful insight into Florence's life. The reader is first introduced to the city's streets, to what was happening there when the story began. The first sentence of the novel consists of topographical information:

> The Loggia de' Cerchi stood in the heart of old Florence, within a labyrinth of narrow streets behind the Badia, now rarely threaded by the stranger, unless in a dubious search for a certain, severely simple doorplace, bearing this inscription:
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> Qui Nacque il Divino Poeta.[5]

The narrator goes on to say of Florentine streets that

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[4] D. Barrett, 'Introduction', in George Eliot, Romola, Penguin: London, 1966, p.X

> ... in the fifteenth century, they were only noisy with the unhistorical quarrels and broad jests of woolcarders in the cloth-producing quarters of San Martino and Garbo.[6]

And, after this, the narrator gives important chronological information: 'Under this loggia, in the early morning of the 9th of April 1492, two men had their eyes fixed on each other...'.[7] The reader immediately knows in which precise historical period the story is set; it is soon said that it starts on the day of Lorenzo's death. It is worth noting, though, that George Eliot seems to create a link between past and present; in the first sentence of the novel, when describing 15th century Florence, she points out that 'now', therefore at the time of writing, the Loggia de Cerchi was not any longer a busy area of the city. As we will see, throughout the novel there is a series of correspondences between past and present. Apart from Tito, who is for the moment referred to only as a stranger, the characters to whom the reader is introduced in the first chapters are not the main ones; they may be considered part of the chorus of commentators appearing throughout the novel. Their role now, at the beginning, is to give different views about Florentine life in that moment and, most of all, different opinions about Lorenzo's death. Lawrence Poston focuses on 'the slow beginning of Romola'[8] and underlines the fact that it '... is due partly

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[5] G. Eliot, Romola, op. cit., p.11
[6] ibid.
[7] ibid.
[8] L. Poston,III, 'Setting and Theme in Romola', Nineteenth-Century Fiction, vol.20,1965-66,p.356

to the extended pronouncements of the chorus in the first few chapters'.[9] He points out that

> The opening scene in the Mercato Vecchio introduces a number of different views on Florentine affairs, and the spokesmen (at least tangentially associated with Tito) reappear at intervals throughout the novel. Ser Cioni is an anti-Medicean, Niccolo' Caparra a republican but something of a cynic, Nanni a member of Savonarola's party.[10]

By means of this 'chorus device' George Eliot emphasises the co-existence of different attitudes and political beliefs in Florence at that moment. As the Italian critic Asor Rosa maintains, in that period Florence and the whole of Italy's situation was certainly characterised by splendour and prosperity, thanks to both the past century's economic development and to the peaceful political state of things. At the same time, however, he points out that the historical period from 1492 to 1559, (commonly considered the period of the actual Italian Renaissance) started to witness what has been called the crisis of Italian freedom, which is the start of Italian decadence, caused by the weakness of the Italian States and the political interference of the foreign monarchies.[11] The impression the reader has when reading Romola is that George Eliot had realised the richness and liveliness of the Italian Renaissance, but also its instability. In the first chapter, through her spokesmen, she gives the reader a view of the different reactions the death of Lorenzo de

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[9] ibid.
[10] ibid.,pp.356-7
[11] A. Asor Rosa, Storia della Letteratura Italiana, op. cit., p. 133

Medici had produced in Florence. One of them, Nello, whose role in the novel I will discuss later, says:

'Ah! a great man - a great politician - a greater poet than Dante. And yet the cupola didn't fall, only the lantern. *Che miracolo!*'.[12] On the other hand, the other spokesman comments:

> What! do you think the death of Lorenzo is the scourge God has prepared for Florence? Go! you are sparrows chattering praise over the dead hawk. What! a man who was trying to slip a noose over every neck in the Republic that he might tighten it at his pleasure! You like that; you like to have the election of your magistrates turned into closet-work, and no man to use the rights of a citizen unless he is a Medicean. ...you take no notice when the public treasury has got a hole in the bottom for the gold to run into Lorenzo's drains. ... And you think the death of a man, who would soon have saddled and bridled you as the Sforza has saddled and bridled Milan - you think his death is the scourge God is warning you by portents. I tell you there is another sort of scourge in the air.[13]

The eighth chapter of the novel is another example of George Eliot's detailed picture of Florence's historical life; the external event described in the chapter is the religious procession on the day of S. Giovanni. Not only does the novelist portray what

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[12] G. Eliot, Romola ,op. cit.,p.18

happened on that day at the time of the novel's action, but, before doing so, she gives the reader information about what this feast meant historically and what used to happen on that day. She explains that 'San Giovanni had been the patron saint of Florence for at least eight hundred years',[14] since, as she learned through Villani, the old idol Mars had been deposed; and then she points out that

> Much good had come to Florence since the dim time of struggle between the old patron and the new: some quarrelling and bloodshed, doubtless, between Guelf and Ghibelline, between Black and White, between orthodox sons of the Church and heretic Paterini; some floods, famine, and pestilence; but still much wealth and glory. Florence had achieved conquests over walled cities once mightier than itself...The name of Florence had been growing prouder and prouder in all the courts of Europe, nay, in Africa itself, on the strength of purest gold coinage, finest dyes and textures, pre-eminent scholarship and poetic genius, and wits of the most serviceable sort for the statesmanship and banking: it was a name so omnipresent that a Pope with a turn for epigram had called Florentines "the fifth element".[15]

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[13] ibid.,pp.18-9
[14] ibid.,p.81
[15] ibid.,pp.81-2

That was the reason why the day of San Giovanni was a day 'of peculiar rejoicing to Florence'[16] and 'should be ushered in by a vigil duly kept in strict old Florentine fashion, with much dancing, with much street jesting, and perhaps with not a little stone-throwing and window-breaking...'.[17] The novelist then focuses her attention on the year of the narration and gives a detailed and clear picture of that important historical moment, as she conceived it:

> Lorenzo the magnificent and subtle was dead, and an arrogant, incautious Piero was come in his room, an evil change for Florence, unless, indeed, the wise horse prefers the bad riders more easily thrown from the saddle; and already the regrets for Lorenzo were getting less predominant over the murmured desire for government on a broader basis, in which corruption might be arrested, and there might be that free play for everybody's jealousy and ambition, which made the ideal liberty of the good old quarrelsome, struggling times, when Florence raised her great buildings, reared her own soldiers, drove out would-be tyrants at the sword's point, and was proud to keep faith at her own loss. Lorenzo was dead, Pope Innocent was dying, and a troublesome Neapolitan succession, with an intriguing, ambitious Milan, might set Italy by the ears before long: the

[16] ibid.,p.82
[17] ibid.

> times were likely to be difficult. Still there was all the more reason that the Republic should keep its religious festivals.[18]

In this passage George Eliot draws attention to some focal aspects of 15th century Florence's history. She not only points out the differences between Lorenzo and Piero de Medici, but she also emphasises the politically difficult and unstable situation of Florence and the whole of Italy. Certainly, it may seem that she dwelt too much on these tense and negative aspects of the Italian Renaissance, which Italian and Florentine intellectuals at that time could not yet perceive in their entirety. However, the picture of the Renaissance provided in Romola is historically true and often sharp; the emphasis given to certain aspects rather than others is, of course, coherent with the moral, ethical question the novel is concerned with. Before moving to the other chapter important as far as the historical picture of Renaissance Florence is concerned, which is the chapter about Charles VIII's entrance in Florence, it is interesting to notice the fact that when dealing with the feast of San Giovanni, the novelist focuses on a discussion, again between two members of the chorus, about the validity of old tradition. On the one hand, Cei maintains that

> ...such a procession as that of some four hundred passably ugly men carrying their tapers in open daylight, Diogenes-fashion, as if they were

[18] ibid.,pp.83-4

looking for a lost *quattrino*, would make a merry spectacle for the Feast of Fools.[19]

On the other hand, Cennini underlines the importance of 'ancient symbols, without which the vulgar would be conscious of nothing beyond their own petty wants of back and stomach, and never rise to the sense of community in religion and law'.[20] This quarrel between two of those novel's minor figures we have called the narrator's spokesmen was probably included in the chapter in order to give a concrete example of what had been said about Florentine history. The discussion about such a central and old motif in the history of man's culture as the quarrel about old and new values, and the fact that it was made by two ordinary Florentine citizens supported the view of the end of the 15th century as a transitional period, swinging between old values, whose collapse it was witnessing, and new values, for which it was searching. At this regard, certainly, George Eliot saw a similarity between Renaissance Italy and her contemporary Victorian age. Both periods were characterised by a lack of certainties, of absolutes caused by the collapse of the old values, which were felt inadequate to explain the actual events, and by a search for a new code of values the individual could rely on. As Renaissance Italy generally had witnessed the collapse of the medieval transcendental values and was looking for new ones, Victorian England was undergoing that revolution of modern thought and beliefs which was brought about by Darwin's ideas.

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[19] ibid.,p.90

In the chapter entitled 'Florence expected a Guest' the reader is provided again with useful and precise information about what was happening in Florence at the time of Tito and Romola's story. As the title of this chapter suggests, in it George Eliot deals with the arrival of Charles VIII in Italy; a historical fact which emphasised the political weakness of Italy. She points out that

> Meanwhile, under that splendid masquerade of dignities sacred and secular which seemed to make the life of lucky Churchmen and princely families so luxurious and amusing, there were certain conditions at work which slowly tended to disturb the general festivity. [21]

And she explains the fact that Italy was divided into many little states, each trying to impose its dominion on one another, but none succeeding. She underlines once again that

> Lorenzo de Medici, it was thought, did much to prevent the fatal outbreak of such jealousies, keeping up the old Florentine alliance with Naples and the Pope, and yet persuading Milan that the alliance was for the general advantage. But young Piero de' Medici's rash vanity had quickly nullified the effect of his father's wary policy, and Ludovico Sforza, roused to suspicion of a league against him, thought of a move which would checkmate his adversaries: he determined to invite the French king to

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[20] ibid.,p.91

march into Italy, and, as heir of the house of Anjou, take possession of Naples. [22]

This is a good example of how George Eliot provided Victorian readers with a careful and researched picture of the period, and perceived what the true political situation was. The historian Francesco Guicciardini in the first chapter of his Storia d'Italia,[23] written between 1537 and 1539, maintained that the disgraces of Italy caused so much sorrow and fear in everyone because *universal things*, as he wrote, were gay and happy. He emphasised the economic prosperity and the cultural richness characterising the period. The critic Asor Rosa notes that Guicciardini's point of view is an example of the fact that his contemporaries considered Italy as the house of every beauty and art, but also of the fact that they were astonished when they realised the actual frailty hidden behind that strength and splendour.[24] The historical picture given in Romola is, therefore, detailed and, thus, useful for an understanding of the nature, of the features of that period. However, one cannot fail to notice that George Eliot tended to emphasise the fact that the enjoyment of life characterising the period was amoral, that Renaissance Florence was characterised by corruption and lasciviousness, and that as a counterbalance, but only as a counterbalance, it witnessed a flourishing of culture and of all kinds of arts (I will deal with this view of the period's cultural context in the next paragraph). Therefore, on the one hand, the novelist showed a thorough understanding of Italian Renaissance; on the

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[21] ibid.,p.210
[22] ibid.
[23] transl. : History of Italy

other hand, her view of it seems to bear similarities with Ruskin's in the emphasis given to its negative aspects, which was certainly coherent with the development of the ethical issues of the novel. The emphasis laid in the novel on the moral corruption of the period calls to mind the fact that Ruskin identified the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance with the start of the decay of Venice and of the whole of Italy. Kenneth Churchill points out that while the Italian Renaissance 'came increasingly to represent the individualism, amoral enjoyment of life, and colourfulness',[25] 'the dominant ethos of the Victorian period',[26] and George Eliot's own position too, seemed to repress these elements when dealing with Italian Renaissance.

2) George Eliot's View of the Cultural Context of Italian Renaissance

In the chapter about the entrance in Florence of Charles VIII in 1493 George Eliot points out that

> At the close of 1492, the year in which Lorenzo de' Medici died and Tito Melema came as a wanderer to Florence, Italy was enjoying a peace and prosperity unthreatened by any near and definite danger [27];

but then she notes that

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[24] A. Asor Rosa, Storia della Letteratura Italiana, op.cit., pp. 133-4
[25] K. Churchill, op. cit., p.
[26] ibid.

> Although this world, with its partitioned empire and its roomy universal Church seemed to be a handsome establishment for the few who were lucky or wise enough to reap the advantages of human folly: a world in which lust and treachery, oppression and murder, were pleasant, useful, and when properly managed, not dangerous.[28]

The point from which she looked at and described the cultural context of Renaissance was, certainly, near to the Ruskinian point of view; in a passage of Romola she explicitly pointed out that the Renaissance cultural richness was a counterbalance of the corruption and moral degeneracy of the period. In fact, she writes

> And, as a sort of fringe or adornment to the substantial delights of tyranny, avarice, and lasciviousness, there was the patronage of polite learning and the fine arts, so that flattery could always be had in the choicest Latin to be commanded at that time, and sublime artists were at hand to paint the holy and the unclean with impartial skill.[29]

Having underlined this, George Eliot gives a picture of the period as culturally extremely lively and rich. Hilary Fraser notes that in Romola

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[27] G.Eliot, Romola, op. cit.,p.208
[28] ibid.
[29] ibid.,pp.208-9

> Quattrocento Florence is represented as a city in which the ordinary person on the street is excited by the revival of learning and responds naturally and with enthusiasm to beauty and the arts. [30]

Throughout the novel, artists, poets and intellectuals are mentioned; there is a great display of erudition everywhere in the course of the story; furthermore, some of the novel's characters (both leading and minor figures) are intellectuals or are anyway involved with contemporary Florentine intellectual life. I will discuss the role of the most significant of them.

Bardo and Baldassarre are two scholars; they represent that generation of humanists, who, generally speaking, rediscovered the greatness and importance of ancient literatures. Humanism meant, on the one hand, study and interpretation of the classical texts. The cultural context represented by Bardo and Baldassarre was characterised by the careful study of Greek and Latin literatures. This implied a new use and understanding of ancient manuscripts, which, until then, had lain in libraries and monasteries of Europe, without being understood; a thorough knowledge of Greek culture and language, developed by employing intellectuals from the Orient; and, therefore, the discovery of a huge number of materials. On the other hand, this study of classical cultures implied a focus on new values linked with them. In fact, the term humanism meant, together with

[30] H. Fraser, op. cit., p.208

that *studia humanitatis* I have talked about, 'centrality, essentially and pre-eminence of man in the building and evaluation of the universe'.[31] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in the Oratio de hominis dignitate put man at the centre of the universe, and underlined his freedom to choose, to determine his own nature; Leon Battista Alberti in his works pointed out the fact that the human mind could control fortune and could build its own destiny, according to the almost divine potentialities the Creator had given it; Marsilio Ficino in his Theologia Platonica focused on the completeness of human nature, on its ability to overcome every obstacle and every boundary. Asor Rosa notes that these humanist intellectuals seemed to propose a new secular religion, which adopted the elements of the traditional transcendental religion coherent with the new way of conceiving culture and the individual, but, at the same time, practically used them in the actual world. These are, in brief, the main features of the cultural phenomenon called Humanism, which created a cultural civility that served as a model for the whole of Europe till the end of the 16th century. In Romola George Eliot emphasises the study of classical cultures characterising Humanism. Actually, Bardo's lifestyle mirrors that love for Greek and Latin cultures and the desire to study them typical of Humanism, and the humanist rejection of the traditional transcendental religion. However, it does not represent that will to be active in the external world through one's own culture and through the values implied in it we have seen was the other characteristic of Humanism. Bardo describes his work as that of the scribe, and points out the positive aspects of that profession in comparison with that of the hired amanuensis. He says to Romola:

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[31] A. Asor Rosa, Storia della Letteratura Italiana, op. cit.,p.144

> What hired amanuensis can be equal to the scribe who loves the words that grow under his hand, and to whom an error or indistinctness in the text is more powerful than a sudden darkness or obstacle across his path? And even these mechanical printers who threaten to make learning a base and vulgar thing - even they must depend on the manuscript over which we scholars have bent with that insight into the poet's meaning which is closely akin to the *mens divinior* of the poet himself; unless they would flood the world with grammatical falsities and inexplicable anomalies that would turn the very fountain of Parnassus into a deluge of poisonous mud.[32]

With these words Bardo clarifies his point of view and his role in the novel. He belonged to the old generation of humanists; he conceived his work as a careful study of the ancient literatures, which brought him to love and admiration for them, and to a separation from the external world. George Eliot says that '... Romola and her father sat among the parchment and the marble, aloof from the life of the streets on holidays as well as on common days'.[33] The use of the term 'aloof' to describe the intellectual's attitude towards the external world reminds of Matthew Arnold's discussion about the function of culture. As I will show below, in the Preface to Culture and Anarchy he used the same term 'aloof' when talking of the intellectuals' relation with politics. The question of the role of culture in society was widely debated during the Victorian age; in this respect, therefore, George

[32] G. Eliot, Romola, op. cit.,p.50

Eliot emphasises once more the connection she saw between the Renaissance and Victorian England. Bardo says to Romola that

> ...even when I could see, it was with the great dead that I lived; while the living often seemed to me mere spectres - shadows dispossessed of true feeling and intelligence...I have returned from the converse of the streets as from a forgotten dream and have sat down among my books, saying with Petrarca, the modern who is least unworthy to be named after the ancients...[34]

Furthermore, he points out how 'fervid' his study of the Greek tongue had been, thanks to the teaching of the younger Crisolora, Filelfo and Argiropulo. R.H. Hutton in his review notes that one of the great features of the age of the revival of learning George Eliot points out through Bardo and Baldassarre was

> ...that sense of large *human* power which the mastery over a great ancient language, itself the key to a magnificent literature, gave, and which made scholarship then a *passion*...[35]

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[33] ibid.,p.114
[34] ibid.,p.51
[35] R.H. Hutton , op. cit., p.59

As an example from the novel, the critic chose the passage where George Eliot describes Baldassarre's regaining of memory, the consequent regained command of Greek learning, and 'the sense of power which thus returned to him'; [36] George Eliot writes:

> The words arose within him, and stirred innumerable vibrations of memory. He forgot that he was old: he could almost have shouted. The light was come again, mother of knowledge and joy! [37]

and still:

> ...he was once more a man who knew cities, whose sense of vision was instructed with large experience, and who felt the keen delight of holding all things in the grasp of language. Names! Images! - his mind rushed through its wealth without pausing, like one who enters on a great inheritance.[38]

But Bardo underlines also the failure of his studies, the inability to reach a constructive aim. He maintains

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[36] ibid.,p.58
[37] G. Eliot, Romola, op. cit.,p.334
[38] ibid.,pp. 334-5

> For why is a young man like Poliziano (who was not yet born when I was already held worthy to maintain a discussion with Thomas of Sarzana) to have a glorious memory as a commentator on the Pandects - why is Ficino, whose Latin is an offence to me, and who wanders purblind among the superstitious fancies that marked the decline at once of art, literature, and philosophy, to descend to posterity as the very high priest of Platonism, while I, who am more than their equal, have not effected anything but scattered work, which will be appropriated by other men? [39]

The reason he gives for his failure is the fact that his son Dino had forsaken him in the name of religion. However, the reader cannot fail to notice the hints given by the narrator through the parts of the novel concerned with Bardo in order to point out the incompleteness, the lack of something important characterising the way he carried out his work. The picture the reader is given of Bardo's library is that of a room full of incomplete objects; a 'feminine torso',[40] 'a headless statue',[41] 'a bladeless sword',[42] 'infantine limbs severed from the trunk',[43] 'Roman busts',[44] objects whose colours was 'pale or sombre'.[45] Moreover, the narrator notices that 'the vellum bindings...gave little relief to the marble, livid with long burial',[46] that the patch of the carpet 'had long been

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[39] ibid.,pp.52-3
[40] ibid.,p.47
[41] ibid.,pp.47-8
[42] ibid., p.48
[43] ibid.
[44] ibid.
[45] ibid.
[46] ibid.

worn to dimness',[47] that 'the dark bronzes wanted sunlight'.[48] Furthermore, and more important, it is not a coincidence, it is rather coherent with the development of the story, that Bardo is blind, and that the other humanist of the older generation, Baldassarre, suffers from amnesia. Bardo's blindness, like the presence in his library of fragmentary objects, symbolises his inability 'to grasp problems in their entirety'; [49] the view he has of things, situations and persons is wrong and false. What he thinks of Tito is false; it is the artist's Piero di Cosimo's vision which provides the reader with the right track to follow in the understanding of his character. Lawrence Poston suggests that

> ...Bardo, a kind of preliminary study for Casaubon, is the scholar who possesses a somewhat astigmatic integrity and has lost sight of the broader issues toward which scholarship should lead. His physical blindness is almost too obvious a symbol for his intellectual deficiency. Of all the characters in the novel, he perhaps best reflects the decline of Florence. His weariness is contrasted with the restless, creative energy of his ancestors.[50]

This treatment of the character of Bardo has a coherent meaning and role in the development of the story of Tito and Romola, in the search for an ethical code of values which is implied throughout the novel. Bardo conceives his work as segregated from the rest of the external world, he does not put it to the service of mankind. As I have noted,

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[47] ibid.
[48] ibid.
[49] L. Poston,III, op. cit.,p.360

he despises the hired amanuensis and the mechanical printers, whose role in the history of the word's culture had been to diffuse knowledge to a wide audience. What is more important to George Eliot, he is not able to extrapolate from his vast knowledge and culture the values inherent in the ancient world and make them active in his own world. He lives separated from the external world and from his contemporaries, whom he considers mere shadows, and builds a continuous dialogue with the great ancestors. This dialogue does not have positive results and consequences on the external world. Through Romola, through her *Bildung*, George Eliot wanted to point out which moral and ethical values could be considered valid, and, certainly, the attitude towards life of a man who lived aloof from the rest of the world, who did not bring anything constructive in the world he lived in, could not be portrayed as a positive figure.

Two other important figures in the delineation of the cultural context George Eliot described in Romola are Nello, the barber, and Piero di Cosimo. The presence of Nello is relevant in the novel because the function he and his shop have is to gather Florentine intellectuals together and to house cultural discussions. The 15th century Florentine cultural context had to be rich, if a barber's shop was the place where different and important personalities, like Poliziano, Machiavelli and the same Piero di Cosimo, could meet and discuss contemporary historical, political or literary subjects. Of Poliziano, for example, Nello describes

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[50] ibid.,p.359

> ...when he relaxes himself a little in my shop after his lectures, and talks of the gods awaking from their long sleep and making the woods and streams once more...[51];

in the same chapter he talks with Tito about the use Italian intellectuals were making of Greek learning and what they thought of the Greek scholars; he suggests to Tito

> And since, as I see, you know Latin literature as well as Greek, you will not fall into the mistake of Giovanni Argiropulo, who ran full tilt against Cicero and pronounced him all but a pumpkin-head. For, let me give one bit of advice, young man - trust a barber who has shaved the best chins, and kept his eyes and ears open for twenty years - oil your tongue when you talk of the ancient Latin writers and give it an extra dip when you talk of the modern. A wise Greek may win favour among us; witness our excellent Demetrio, who is loved by many, and not hated immoderately even by the most renowned scholars. [52]

Nello is able to have such conversations, to express opinions about a contemporary matter such as the reputation Greek scholars had among Florentines, because he repeats what he hears in his shop; as he himself says to Tito '...my eloquence is simply the cream which I

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[51] G. Eliot, Romola, op. cit., p.33
[52] ibid., p.38

skim off my clients' talk'.[53] In fact, his shop is 'the focus of Florentine intellect, and in that sense the navel of the earth',[54] it is a 'fitting haunt of the Muses',[55] 'a resort of wit and learning'.[56] An example of this is given in chapter XLV when a group of Florentines discuss the nature of the influence Savonarola and the Medici have on Florentine life; between them there are the usual characters belonging to the chorus, like Nello, Cennini and Cei, and Niccolo' Machiavelli, who expresses his opinion about the preacher and his behaviour and actions according to that observation of actual facts which characterised his historical and political point of view. In the chapter George Eliot makes him say that Savonarola's 'game is an impossible one',[57] and explains why it was politically so, giving a picture of the period's political and religious situation; he, moreover, discusses the nature and the quality of his influence on the people. Apart from symbolising with his shop the richness and liveliness of Florence from a cultural point of view, Nello does not have any other peculiar role in himself. He considers himself an artist, he talks of 'the liberal art of the razor',[58] but he does not provide the reader with a true observation of what is happening in the story. His shop is a *conclave of eruditi*, it offers different points of view about events and important personalities, but, as Lawrence Poston pointed out, Nello's 'view of things is narrow'; [59] he is a cultivated person, such a cultivated barber as one may have thought to find in Pericle's Athens, as Tito notices, but he 'remains singularly

[53] ibid., p.37
[54] ibid., p.33
[55] ibid., p.34
[56] ibid., p.35
[57] ibid., p.394
[58] ibid., p.35
[59] L. Poston,III, op. cit., p. 358

unobservant'. [60] The clear example of this narrow view of things is the fact that he is not able to understand the real nature of Tito; after he has shaved the young Greek, he offers him a mirror to show him the new outline of his face, but he himself is unable to see it. At a symbolical level, this *blindness* of Nello is represented by the fact that he does not understand the meaning of Piero di Cosimo's sketch, which Tito saw in his shop. The probable symbolical meaning of this fact will be clear if we notice that Piero di Cosimo is the only character of the novel who has a clear and true view of what is happening around him. Before discussing Piero's role in the novel, it is relevant to point out that the same comparison Tito draws between Renaissance Florence and Pericles' Athens can be found in Pater's Preface to his Renaissance. As I have noted in the previous chapter, Pater, and also Symonds, emphasised the extremely rich and lively nature of the Renaissance cultural context. Furthermore, they believed that the Renaissance was a complex and many sided period, and I have shown that George Eliot's picture of the Renaissance is similarly complex. They all pointed out the co-existence in it of pagan and Christian elements.

I will now turn my attention to Piero di Cosimo function in the novel. The fact that it is an artist who provides the reader with hints about the truth hidden in the story is, of course, significant in itself. What is worth noticing about Piero is, first of all, the fact that if he, an artist, is the speaker of the truth in the novel, then the social environment where he produced his art is sympathetic and congenial to the development of it. He is, therefore, another example of how positive and lively Florentine context was as far as culture was

[60] ibid

concerned. However, George Eliot chose for this role an artist who had been historically portrayed as weird, freakish and aloof; William J. Sullivan suggests that these qualities underlined the fact that he despised his contemporary social context. As the critic points out,

> ...the details which Vasari had catalogued as indications of Piero's brutishness, George Eliot transmutes into metaphors for a life lived in intimate contact with elementary humanity - a life necessarily involving wildness, but a wildness which in its honesty is preferable to civilised decadence. Like Tessa and Baldassarre, and like Romola herself at the end of the novel, Piero di Cosimo suggests a fundamental naturalness which acts as an important contrast to and corrective of Florentine effeteness. [61]

The choice of Piero di Cosimo as the spokesman of truth is, thus, coherent with the picture of Renaissance Florence George Eliot gives us in Romola, on the one hand, as a milieu so congenial and receptive towards the artist's role that he could become the only person able to perceive the truth; on the other hand, as a social environment whose features stimulated a contemptuous attitude in the artist. Therefore, the picture the reader is given through Piero's words is congruent with the moral and ethical aim of the novel. Piero's behaviour and features as an artist are certainly linked to the ideas about art and the artist George Eliot had been formulating since the 1850s. Sullivan notes that 'Direct

observation of real objects is at once the foundation of Piero's aesthetic and the starting point for each of his paintings'. [62] In fact, for example, during the course of the novel he asks Tito, Baldassarre, Romola and Bardo to sit for him; moreover, though he is represented as a loner, he is always present at the public scenes described in Romola. He is one of the frequenters of Nello's shop, he is present at San Giovanni's procession, he is at Piazza del Duomo when Charles VIII enters Florence, and he is present at the Bonfire of Vanities. Though he shows contempt, annoyance and irritation for what happens around him, it is his duty as an artist to observe actual life in order to give a truthful representation of it. In the chapter about the feast of San Giovanni it is said of Piero that

> ...he would bury himself in the most solitary spot of the Valdarno on a *festa*, if he were not condemned, as a painter, to lie in wait for the secrets of colour that were sometimes to be caught from the floating of banners and the chance grouping of the multitudes. [63]

Just a week after the entrance of the French Piero di Cosimo 'in his biting way' [64] tells Nello how frightened Tito was when he saw him; he says: 'What colour do you think a man's liver is, who looks like a bleached deer as soon as a chance stranger lays hold of him suddenly', [65] and it is, naturally, relevant to and consistent with what I have said so

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[61] W.J. Sullivan, 'Piero di Cosimo and the Higher Primitivism in *Romola*', Nineteenth - Century Fiction, vol. 26, 1971-72, pp. 391-2
[62] ibid., p. 393
[63] G. Eliot, Romola, op. cit., p.85
[64] ibid., p. 258
[65] ibid., pp.258-9

far that Nello does not believe him, rather defends his '*bel erudito*'.[66] The presence of Piero at the Bonfire of Vanities is, of course, symbolic and very important; his opinion about what is happening represents the voice of the artist about an event caused by a man whose attitude towards culture was, naturally, linked to his religious view of life. The artist defends the freedom to observe and choose. When he meets Romola at the bonfire, he asks her what she thinks of 'this folly',[67] and when she justifies the friar's behaviour saying that some of those books deserved to be burnt, Piero harshly replies

> And I should like to know what the excellent Messer Bardo would have said to the burning of the divine poets by these Frati, who are no better an imitation of men than if they were onions with the bulbs uppermost. Look at that Petrarca sticking up beside a rouge-pot: do the idiots pretend that the heavenly Laura was a painted harridan ? And Boccaccio, now: do you mean to say, Madonna Romola - you who are fit to be a model for a wise saint Catherine of Egypt - do you mean to say you have never read the stories of the immortal Messer Giovanni ?[68]

As the discussion goes on and Romola defends the friar's attitude, Piero replies 'bitterly, turning on his heel and walking away from her':[69] '"Yes, yes, it's very well to say so now

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[66] ibid.,p.259
[67] ibid., p.421
[68] ibid.
[69] ibid.,p.422

you've read them"'.[70] Thus, it seems clear that Piero offers a point of view about situations and persons which is complex and comprehensive; Sullivan maintains that

> Piero not only sees, he sees the complexity of things. His untrimmed garden includes "nettles and hemlock" among the "fig trees and vines" - the destructive as well as the sustaining. His allegorical picture of the Three Masks combines the grotesque satyr and "cold, rigid" stoic with the cherubic features and heavenly gaze of the child on whose lap the masks rest (3: 51). His portrait of Tito blends "the terrible with the gay" (18: 287), and his procession, the Allegory of Time, is a "grim merriment" (20: 309).[71]

In fact, Piero provides the reader with hints useful to understand the real nature of the two main characters of Tito and Savonarola. It is he who has doubts about the good nature of Tito everyone is sure of; when they first meet, Piero asks him to sit as Sinon deceiving Priamo, and says his face perfectly suits the traitor of his picture; it is again Piero who witnesses Tito's encounter with Baldassarre at the Duomo, and it is his painting, 'The Painted Record', which first helps Romola to understand the truth about her unfaithful husband. Moreover, what he says on the occasion of the Bonfire of Vanities gives Romola a first hint about the incomplete view of life Savonarola proposes, about the negative

[70] ibid.
[71] W.J. Sullivan, op. cit., p. 394

aspects of his teaching, which are underlined, as I will show in a while, by the development of Romola's *Bildung*.

3) TheRole of Savonarola

Savonarola is the representative of the Christian aspects of the Florence George Eliot described in Romola. Also in this case, as in Piero's, the choice of this particular historical figure was not random. In his contemporary Florence, Savonarola had an important role both politically, socially and culturally. He opposed the Medicean power and founded the Florentine Republic after the Medici's expulsion from the city; moreover, from a cultural point of view, he was the most important representative of the religious literature which flourished in that many-sided and rich cultural context at the close of the 15th century. As Asor Rosa points out, in his Prediche Savonarola expressed the 'largely diffused necessity of a moral reformation of the Church and of a general return to the ancient customs'.[72] Not only did he preach, but he fought against the enemies of the faith and gained many followers, who were inspired by the same religious beliefs, but also by hatred for the Medici and their policy and by a longing for Republican government in Florence. It is the religious fervour, the link Savonarola felt with the ancient religious values, and the contempt for the situation of contemporary Florence which is underlined in the novel. In the lively cultural context George Eliot described, Savonarola represents the survival, or the rebirth, of the medieval religious values; his presence in the novel is

[72] A. Asor Rosa, Storia della Letteratura Italiana, op. cit.,p. 128

explained by the aim of the story: the search for an adequate code of ethical values. In such a search, the religious transcendental dimension could not be missing, but, as we will see, and as we have already realised through the analysis of Piero's role, the answer the novel tries to give is not religious.

Savonarola is first introduced to the reader when Romola goes to see her dying brother. Dino's minor role in the novel is parallel to Savonarola's; he forsook his father and, therefore, decided not to adopt his lifestyle and his humanistic values in the name of religion. In a tone not 'of imperious command, but of quiet self-possession and assurance of the right, blended with benignity'[73] Savonarola asks Romola to kneel down in the presence of the Angel of Death. The feeling this first produces in Romola is of rebellion, a rebellion stemming from the hate for religion according to which she was brought up; but, afterwards she is said to have felt '...that subtle mysterious influence of a personality by which it has been given to some rare men to move their fellows'.[74] Thus, she kneels down and '...in the renunciation of her proud erectness, her mental attitude seemed changed, and she found herself in a new state of passiveness'.[75] It is Savonarola who gives her Dino's crucifix, one of the objects of the novel carrying a symbolic meaning, saying : 'He has left you the crucifix in remembrance of the heavenly warning - that it may be a beacon to you in the darkness'.[76] After reading this chapter, it is clear to the reader that Savonarola is

[73] G. Eliot, Romola,op. cit., p.156
[74] ibid., p.157
[75] ibid.
[76] ibid., p.159

going to play an important role in Romola's personal story, in her growth towards the search for true values.

In the chapter about the entrance of Charles VIII in Florence George Eliot gives a description of the role Savonarola played in his contemporary Florence. She focused on the disgraceful state of the Italian Church in that period generally characterised by corruption and moral degeneracy; she acknowledges that

> The Church, it was said, had never been so disgraced in its head, had never shown so few signs of renovating, vital belief in its lower members; nevertheless it was much more prosperous than in some past days.[77]

The novelist points out Savonarola's 'burning indignation at the sight of wrong' [78] and his belief in an 'Unseen Justice' [79] which would have put an end to that amoral state of things. George Eliot writes that

> To his ardent, power-loving soul, believing in great ends, and longing to achieve those ends by the exertion of its own strong will, the faith in a

[77] ibid., p.209
[78] ibid.
[79] ibid.

> supreme and righteous Ruler became one with the faith in a speedy divine interposition that would punish and reclaim.[80]

For four years Savonarola had been preaching the coming in Italy of a scourge which was going to purify the Church. George Eliot focuses also on the belief in prophetic gift which was common in that period. When reproducing one of his sermons, the novelist makes him say : '*...in these times God will regenerate his Church...before the regeneration must come the scourge over all Italy...these things will come quickly*'; [81] and then

> And thou, O Italy, art the chosen land; has not God placed his sanctuary within thee, and thou hast polluted it ? Behold, the ministers of wrath are upon thee - they are at thy very doors ! [82]

When Romola tries to escape from Florence, it is Savonarola who stops her and asks her to go back. The question he puts forward to the woman at this stage of her life is that of the freedom of the individual. As I have noticed, it was a central issue of Humanism and the Renaissance; the point of view of Savonarola was, of course, completely different from that of the Renaissance intellectuals. After experiencing the failure of her father's aims and the negative aspects of her husband's nature, Romola is now brought into contact with the religious attitude to life. In his conversations with

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[80] ibid., pp.209-10
[81] ibid., p.227
[82] ibid.

Romola, Savonarola interprets her problem in these terms: she is trying 'to escape from the lot God has laid' [83] upon her, she is 'flying' [84] from her 'debts' [85] as Florentine woman and as a wife. The fact that the friar focuses on Romola's duty both as a wife and as a Florentine means that the teaching he is giving to the woman deals both with her private and with her public life. He underlines the fact that she is a pagan, all the negative features her paganism had brought to her life, and the fact that she has lived aloof from the external world. That is why she could decide to go away, to escape without understanding the wrong implied in this choice; a choice, he emphasises, an individual is not free to make. He says to Romola

> You are turning your back on the lot that has been appointed for you - you are going to choose another. But man or woman choose duties ? No more than they can choose their birth place or their father and mother. My daughter, you are fleeing from the presence of God into the wilderness. [86]

She can not choose as her brother had done because she does not have a vocation as her brother had; she is a pagan, she is '...as the dead whose eyes are closed, and whose ear is deaf to the work of God that has been since their time'.[87] She had never believed in the religion of the Cross symbolised by the crucifix Dino had given to her. The teaching

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[83] ibid., p.355
[84] ibid., p.357
[85] ibid.
[86] ibid.
[87] ibid., p.361

Savonarola says she must learn, though it is hard for her, is that 'The higher life begins for us, my daughter, when we renounce our own will to bow before a divine law'.[88] This is what the medieval religious element present in Renaissance Italy consisted of; the ethic Savonarola teaches to Romola is the ethic of the negation of the self, of self-sacrifice, of the self-transcending values. Moreover, the friar points out the fact that the pagan environment she was brought up in made her live 'in blindness',[89] 'with those who sit on a hill aloof and look down on the life of their fellow-men',[90] the friar makes her notice that her 'dead wisdom' [91] has left her

> ...without a heart for the neighbours among whom you dwell, without care for the great work by which Florence is to be regenerated and the world made holy; it has left you without a share in the Divine life which quenches the sense of suffering Self in the ardours of an ever-growing love. [92]

Therefore, what he underlines is also her duty towards her city and her fellow-men; there, among them, she was given a place, a role, a work to fulfil.

It seems clear then not only that the presence of Savonarola in the novel is related to the necessity George Eliot felt to give a truthful picture of the historical events Florence

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[88] ibid., p.360
[89] ibid., p.358
[90] ibid.
[91] ibid., p.361
[92] ibid.

had witnessed at the close of the 15th century and of the lively cultural atmosphere one could breath there, but that he becomes part of the narrative story, introducing Romola to an important stage of her ethical role. He represents that Christian, religious view of life stemming from the Middle-Ages as opposed to the pagan, self-centred view of life based on Humanistic and Renaissance values, which was represented by George Eliot in the character of Tito.

4) The Role of Tito and Romola

Tito is the first leading character of the novel to be presented to the reader; and one of the features of his character and of his attitude towards life the reader is soon brought to understand is his point of view about religion. In the famous passage when he is asked by Nello what he thinks of Florence Cathedral, he replies

> ...your buildings smack too much of Christian barbarism for my taste. I have a shuddering sense of what there is inside - hideous smoked Madonnas; fleshless saints in mosaic, staring down idiotic astonishment and rebuke from the apse; skin - clad skeletons hanging on crosses, or stuck all over with arrows, or stretched on gridirons; women and monks with heads aside in perpetual lamentation. [93]

[93] ibid., pp.32-3

When Romola narrates to Tito the vision her brother had had of him as the great tempter, he gives his future wife his view about Savonarola as 'a narrow-minded monk, with a gift of preaching and infusing terror into the multitude'; [94] on the day of their wedding he locks the crucifix Dino had given to Romola inside the triptych Piero had painted for him on commission and that he gives to Romola as

> ...a little shrine, which is to hide away from you for ever that remembrancer of sadness. You have done with sadness now; and we will bury all images of it - bury them in a tomb of joy. See ! [95]

Tito, then, does not have a view of religion different from the one Romola had been brought up in, though, as we will see, Romola undergoes an ethical *Bildung*, which makes her abandon the pagan attitude towards life and embrace a secular morality.

The other characteristic of Tito's personality also seems familiar to Romola's environment; that is his erudition. Nello, in fact, introduces him to Bardo as 'the Greek scholar',[96] and the first words of welcome Bardo addresses to him are:

> ...misfortune wedded to learning, and especially to Greek learning, is a letter of credit that should win the ear of every instructed Florentine; for, as

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[94] ibid., p.177
[95] ibid., pp. 197-8
[96] ibid., p.59

> you are doubtless aware, since the period when your countryman, Manuelo Crisolora, diffused the light of his teaching in the chief cities of Italy, now nearly a century ago, no man is held worthy of the name of scholar who has acquired merely the transplanted and derivative literature of the Latins; rather, such inert students are stigmatised as *opici* or barbarians according to the phrase of the Romans themselves, who frankly replenished their urns at the fountain-head. [97]

It is clear from this passage that Tito has a place in the rich cultural context of Renaissance intellectuals. Bardo's mention of Manuelo Crisolora, whose going to Florence in 1396 to teach Greek literature on invitation of the humanist Coluccio Salutati has been traditionally referred to as the external event which started Humanism, is an evident sign of the link George Eliot (and Bardo) was creating between the humanist and Tito. But, whereas Bardo belongs to the old generation of Humanists, Tito, like Romola herself, belongs to a different generation. His culture and the use he makes of it express a different system of values, which certainly belongs in many respects to the Renaissance conception of man, and which George Eliot pictured according to her view of this period. In fact, Tito is a negative character; as we have seen at the beginning of the novel Piero, on their first meeting, asks him to sit for his painting of Sinon deceiving Priamo; later on Dino depicts him as the great tempter. These are the hints the reader is given in order to understand Tito's true nature of a betrayer of his father, of his wife, and of his father-in-law, and of a

[97] ibid., p.60

man capable of political fraud. The fact that he betrays his father and his father-in-law is a symbol of his 'disregard for the past';[98] actually, the behaviour he develops throughout the novel contrasts with Bardo's attitude towards life. Bardo has seen in him the Greek scholar who shares his cultural view and, therefore, his view about life, and who can help him in the fulfilment of his aim; but, as R. H. Hutton points out, the younger generation of the novel, represented by Tito, Dino and Romola, has inherited its father's scholarship, but 'finds it wholly inadequate for its wants.[99] They all turn away from it; but while Dino and Tito do not find a right and complete answer, Romola undergoes all the different levels of experience, symbolised by the men of her life, and then tries to find her own right answer. Tito's attitude towards life seems to be characterised by that central place Humanism and the Renaissance gave to man and by the consequent individualism, search for one's own pleasure, and freedom to choose as it may please oneself, which George Eliot depicted as amoral qualities leading to moral degeneracy. As I have shown when dealing with Bardo's view of life, Humanists like Alberti, Pico della Mirandola, Ficino underlined the centrality of the individual in the universe and the fact that he could determine his own destiny. The Renaissance intellectual, in fact, had to find a new moral code which could substitute the old transcendental one in the explanation of the world's events, and the only element he saw with certainty was the fact that whatever the explanation was, it had to stem from man. Tito places himself and the fulfilment of his aims at the centre of the universe, but he is portrayed negatively by George Eliot. That freedom to choose one's own destiny he allows himself and which was a characteristic of the Renaissance man, leads him to moral

[98] F.B. Pinion , A George Eliot Companion, London: The MacMillan Press, 1981, p. 148

corruption both in his private and his public life. When he meets Baldassarre, the narrator explains what passes through his mind with these words

> He had simply chosen to make life easy to himself - to carry his human lot, if possible, in such a way that it should pinch him nowhere; and the choice had, at various times, landed him in unexpected positions. The question now was not whether he should divide the common pressure of destiny with his suffering fellow-men; it was whether all the resources of lying would save him from being crushed by the consequences of that habitual choice.[100]

Yet, he was crushed by the consequences of his choice; in fact, he does not seem to have taken into account that sphere of life which is unexplainable and uncontrollable to man, the sphere of life whose existence Renaissance intellectuals were aware of and which they called fortune (one may think of Ariosto and Machiavelli), and which is here represented, as far as Tito's story is concerned, by the fact that Baldassarre ends up in Florence. What is anyway important for our discussion now is the fact that the character who represents Renaissance individualism is portrayed by George Eliot negatively. This is all coherent with the picture she gives of Florence at that time both historically, socially and culturally. As we have seen, the novelist underlines the unstable political situation of the city, its corruption, and notices that the liveliness of its culture was a counterpoise to his

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[99] R.H. Hutton, op. cit., p. 60

lasciviousness . This is well represented in the development of Tito; the idea George Eliot seems to bring about with him is that such an environment could not but bring an individual like him to make wrong choices. The fact that he is conceived as the representative of Renaissance individualism and enjoyment of life is confirmed by the association between him and the South of Italy; he tells Romola

> I wish we lived in Southern Italy, where thought is broken, not by weariness, but by delicious languors such as never seem to come over the "*ingenia acerrima Florentina*". I should like to see you under that southern sun, lying among the flowers, subdued into near enjoyment, while I bent over you and touched the lute and sang to you some little unconscious strain that seemed all one with light and the warmth.[101]

This passage calls to mind such Renaissance verses as those of Poliziano or Sannazzaro; moreover, I have noticed in the previous chapter the association the South as opposed to the North had for Victorian and post-Victorians intellectuals. This mention of the South of Italy emphasises the fact that Tito's 'appeal to Romola is the appeal of a life of sensation',[102] as Janet Gezari suggests. The critic points out the association George Eliot creates in the novel between Tito and Bacchus, and Tito and Cupid; she maintains that

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[100] G. Eliot, Romola, op. cit., p.224
[101] ibid.,pp.179-180
[102] J.K. Gezari,'Romola and the Myth of Apocalypse'. in George Eliot: Centenary Essays and an Unpublished Fragment, Ed. A. Smith, London: Vision Press,1980, p.88

'The idea of Tito as Cupid works to underline his commitment to pleasure and his evasion of the responsibilities more human characters undertake'.[103]

It remains now to analyse the character of Romola to have a full idea of the view of Italian Renaissance emerging from the novel. The answer she gives to Tito apropos of South Italy explains her nature and the fact that her attitude towards life is different from Tito's. She tells him

> I am very thirsty for a deep draught of joy - for a life all bright like you. But we will not think of it now, Tito; it seems to me as if there would always be pale sad faces among the flowers, and eyes that look in vain. Let us go.[104]

After reading this passage, it will be clear to the reader that Romola, though belonging like Tito to the younger generation of the novel, does not share his approach to life. She wants to enjoy life with him, but those 'pale sad faces' she seems to see among flowers and those eyes looking in vain are a symbol of the wrong she discovers characterises Tito's view of life. When pointing out that Tito, Dino and Romola realise the inadequacy of the old generation's teaching, R.H. Hutton maintains that she tries to turn that teaching

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[103] ibid., p.99
[104] ibid.

> ...to its true purpose, viz., that of clarifying and sifting the false from the true elements in the great mysterious faith presented to her conscience by Savonarola. [105]

She is the character of the novel who grows, who undergoes a *Bildung*; it is through her story and inner development that the ethical search we have seen was the aim of the novel takes place. Bardo, Tito and Savonarola represent the different stages of knowledge she must experience in order to discern the true and false elements in them and to reach a comprehensive moral stage of development. She is the daughter of Bardo and was brought up in an environment characterised by paganism and aloof dedication to culture. Throughout the novel she always shows affection towards her father, but she also understands that his attitude towards life is not right. A sign of this is the fact that she marries Tito; through him she is brought into contact with that amoral enjoyment of life, with that corrupt way of determining one's own destiny which Tito represents. At first she is enchanted by his charm and by those values which George Eliot seems to point out have a positive appeal only superficially. Indeed, Romola discovers that at a deeper, and therefore truer level, the values Tito has embraced and his attitude to life are completely wrong. Finally, she comes into contact with the religious, transcendental side of life through Savonarola. It is worth noting that she feels a strong attraction to and a link with the values represented by the friar, and that also when she discovers their incompleteness and inadequacy, she nevertheless has positive words for the friar. This means that while

[105] R.H. Hutton, op. cit., p. 60

the Renaissance values symbolised by Tito are seen by George Eliot in a completely negative light, the medieval values represented by Savonarola have some good in them. I have already noticed that when Romola first meets Savonarola at Dino's death-bed, she feels as if she were being subjugated by him; as a woman educated in a pagan environment, in a complete disregard for Christian values, her first rational reaction is to rebel against him. In fact, when Savonarola joins her in her flight from Florence and arrests her, her first instinct is that of rebellion; the narrator points out that

> Romola's mind rose in stronger rebellion with every sentence. She was the more determined not to show any sign of submission, because the consciousness of being inwardly shaken made her dread lest she should fall into irresolution. She spoke with more irritation than before.[106]

But afterwards the narrator acknowledges that 'the anger melted from Romola's mind',[107] and, actually, she accepts the friar's suggestion. It is clear that the choice to go back to Florence means that she has realised how dead the 'pagan wisdom' she has accepted till then is, and that she has accepted that teaching of self-sacrifice to God, of relying on his decisions and commandments which Savonarola has exposed to her, and to abandon that life aloof from her fellow-men she has lived since then. This may be considered a turning point in the narrative because, on the one hand, it shows Romola's change of attitude, but, on the other hand, it also underlines why Romola, in the end, realises the inadequacy and

[106] G. Eliot, Romola, op. cit., p.356

wrong sides of this attitude towards life. It is the question of the individual's choice which is discussed in Romola, and it is this issue which brings her away from the transcendental religion she has known through Savonarola. The problem she faces is 'where the sacredness of obedience ended, and where the sacredness of rebellion began'; [108] this is that problem of choice present in the development both of Tito and of Savonarola. We have already seen that Tito's answer to this problem is wrong; Romola finds out that also Savonarola's solution is wrong. It is when discussing with him a political matter, the liberation of Bernardo del Nero, that Romola realises the flaws in Savonarola's teaching. Therefore, what George Eliot underlines about the friar's experience is the fact that he did not limit his preaching to the religious field, he was also an active political figure. Through the figure of Savonarola, the novelist emphasises 'how easily moral yearnings, in her term religious needs, were blended with more worldly appetites'.[109] He preached the impossibility for man to choose his own destiny, but in practice he made historical and political choices. Through him the novelist points out that corrupt state of the Church typical of that period which stemmed from this interference with secular matters. George Eliot, who we know had deeply analysed the religious problem, makes Romola accept the teaching of Savonarola at first; but, then she emphasises the fact that the ethical search cannot end there, that Romola has to find a solution which overcomes the flaws in Savonarola's teaching. In the chapter 'Pleading' the two characters have this conversation :

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[107] ibid., p.357
[108] ibid., p.468
[109] J.K. Gezari, op. cit., p.88

"Do you, then, know so well what will further the coming of God's kingdom, father, that you will dare to despise the plea of mercy - of justice - of faithfulness to your own teaching ? Has the French King, then, brought renovation to Italy ? Take care, father, lest your enemies have some reason when they say, that in your visions of what will further God's kingdom you see only what will strengthen your own party".

"And that is true !" said Savonarola, with flashing eyes. Romola's voice had seemed to him in that moment the voice of his enemies. "The cause of my party *is* the cause of God's kingdom."

"I do not believe it!" said Romola, her whole frame shaken with passionate repugnance. "God's kingdom is something wider - else, let me stand outside it with the beings I love." [110]

The answer to her ethical problem she then finds was hinted in Savonarola's own words; it consists of an active presence in the real world which could bring some good where it was missing. As Jerome Thale points out

> Romola begins as a proud humanist, the daughter of a man who scorns Christianity; but humanism, at least in its philological and polemical form, gives her no answer about the meaning of life. Then she is disillusioned

[110] ibid., p.492

about her husband; and she comes under the influence of Savonarola's asceticism. For the time there is satisfaction in putting up with her unhappy marriage and in helping the sick and poor. When she receives further shocks, Christianity fails her. She undergoes a second and larger crisis and tries to kill herself. After a kind of baptism in a plague-stricken village, Romola is healed; she is able to go back to Florence and devote herself to others. She no longer needs the support of ideology. Though her beliefs have changed, the force behind her conduct has remained constant: her Christian self-abasement and her final altruism are as much products of activism as her initial pride or her flight from Tito had been.[111]

In the Epilogue, after having reached the comprehensive ethical stage from which to see the world, Romola explains to Lillo what role Bardo, Savonarola and Tito had had in their world, thus summarising her opinion about them. Of Bardo she says:

> The world was not always very kind to him...And then his dear son thought it right to leave him and become a man; and after that, my father, being blind and lonely, felt unable to do the things that would have made his learning of greater use to men, so that he might still have lived in his works after he was in his grave.[112]

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[111] J. Thale, The Novels of George Eliot, New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1967, p. 85

Her comment about Savonarola is:

> ...*he* had the greatness which belongs to a life spent in struggling against powerful wrong, and in trying to raise men to the highest deeds they are capable of.[113]

And of Tito she notices:

> There was a man to whom I was very near, so that I could see a great deal of his life who made almost every one fond of him, for he was young, and clever, and beautiful, and his manners to all were gentle and kind. I believe, when I first knew him, he never thought of doing anything cruel or base. But because he tried to slip away from everything that was unpleasant, and cared for nothing else so much as his own safety, he came at last to commit some of the basest deeds - such as make men infamous. He denied his father, and left him to misery; he betrayed every trust that was reposed in him that he might keep himself safe and get rich and prosperous. Yet calamity overtook him.[114]

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[112] G. Eliot, Romola, op. cit., p.582
[113] ibid.
[114] ibid., p.583

5) Correspondences between Past and Present

As I have noted, some of the questions arising in Romola show that George Eliot in the novel emphasises the existence of a link between the Renaissance and Victorian England. The religious problem discussed in the novel through the figure of Savonarola, the necessity felt by Romola to find a place in the world, the role that culture had to play in society, as it appears through the characters of Bardo and Piero di Cosimo, are all matters extremely relevant for the Victorian reader. All these questions are linked with the general problem of the role of individuals in a society which is changing. Victorian England with its fast economic development and all which it implied in terms of the individuals' relation to society, religion, culture, in few words in terms of their attitude towards life, was certainly a period of great changes during which intellectuals felt the necessity to search for new codes of interpretation of a reality which could not be understood by referring to the old values.

Religious questions were debated during Victorian age, the birth of the Oxford Movement being a clear example of it. The fact that such a movement was born in that period emphasises the necessity felt by some intellectuals to strengthen English faith, which they felt was in danger. They wanted to revitalise the Church of England by reviving doctrines which had fallen into disuse. It is evident that economic development, the progress of science and the revolutionary ideas of Darwin had created doubt in the

public conscience about the validity of the interpretation of reality provided by transcendental religion. The view of the universe provided by science was not compatible with the religious view of human destiny as being characterised by the phases of Creation, Fall, Judgement and Redemption. As we know, the main consequence of the progress of science on the history of human thought was the painful discovery that the universe was meaningless, that it lacked coherence. This painful feeling of nihilism was commonly felt by intellectuals of the second half of 19th century. Intellectuals seem to have struggled to find a solution to this situation. Carlyle asserted that the universe, despite all appearances, was a spiritual entity, which means that it had an inner purpose which included man. In In Memoriam Tennyson perceived the nihilism characterising the universe, but reached a faith in an inherent universal purpose. Matthew Arnold linked the thought of God with the concept of moral good, and maintained that there was a tendency towards righteousness. The Darwinian theory of the development of the species itself, while it increased the fear that man was not created to fulfil the specific purpose of a divine creator, through the theory of the development of forms from the lowest to the highest also suggested that the evolution of the species has an inner purpose in itself. It is evident that religious problems, the necessity of finding a solution to the nihilism, at least the necessity to discuss such matters were felt by the Victorians intellectuals, and so did George Eliot in Romola. The figure of Savonarola who wants to reawaken the consciousness of his contemporary fellow men reminds us of the experience of the Oxford Movement. The religious question which George Eliot analyses in the novel is the question of finding the right spiritual attitude towards life and our fellow men. This is where Romola's experience tends to, and

the problem is certainly linked with Victorian consciousness. In his Philosophy of History Hegel maintains that the modern age, which began with the Renaissance, was characterised by a commitment to a secular morality. In Romola George Eliot seems to accept Hegel's link between Renaissance and the modern age in the sense that it is in that period that she sets the *Bildung* of her heroine towards an ethical stage which permits a thorough understanding of life and a right involvement in it. Romola's *Bildung* is represented in Positivist terms; as we have seen, it can be considered as the passage from polytheism to monotheism to a non-transcendental morality, and we know that this development was theorised by Comte.

From what we have said above, it is clear that Romola's experience emphasises the search for a code of interpretation of reality which is the secular spirituality Hegel talked about. Romola's story underlines also the problem of finding a place, a role within society. The terms in which this is described by George Eliot seem to hide the novelist's Victorian social and cultural background. The problems about the nature of marital vows, of the relation between husband and wife, the economic problems of the husband who disposes of the wife's property are certainly modern problems posed during Victorian age. In that period in England the woman question engaged public attention. Tito's power as a husband to dispose of the Bardi's library is an issue which was being debated at George Eliot's time. The Married Women's Property Acts, passed in 1870 and 1882, were the testimony of Victorian feminists' fight to win legal protection for the property and incomes of married women. The issue is present in many Victorian novels, such as Anne

Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. Even more importantly, Romola's story, as we have noted, poses the problems of finding a place in society, which was a central problem for all individuals in an age of changes, and which was a central problem for Victorian women. In the novel the reader is told that the heroine's problem is to understand the dialectic between rebellion and obedience. This can be read as the problem of women who could not find their own place in society unless they rebelled, but, at the same time were not allowed a thorough power of rebelling against the restriction imposed by society. In one of her essays about Romola, Dorothea Barrett points out that the question of when to rebel is a purely personal issue in Romola's life, it is 'a question of when to leave her husband or when to leave, for moral reasons, a church that will not be affected by her absence'.[117] The critic emphasises the difference between Romola's experience of the dichotomy between obedience and rebellion and Savonarola's. She suggests:

> Had she been a real citizen of fifteenth-century Florence, as was Savonarola, she would still not be, as he is, a historic figure, inasmuch as history is not the past itself but the written record of the past, and her story would not have been recorded. This difference between the lives of exceptional men and exceptional women, which is as much a problem in Victorian England as in fifteenth-century Florence, is ironically reflected in

[117] D. Barrett, 'Romola: Woman as History', in Vocation and Desire, Ed. D. Barrett, London: Routledge,1989, p.85

the fact that Savonarola is actually a character from history, whereas Romola is a fictional construct.[116]

The answer to the interrelated problems of reaching an ethical stage from which to gain an understanding of the universe, and of finding a place in society is secular morality, to use Hegel's words. This solution seems to mirror Victorian consciousness. As we have seen, Victorian intellectuals had acknowledged the doubt characterising their age and felt the necessity to find a solution which permitted her to assign a certain end to the universe. The solution proposed by Victorian intellectuals were, as we have seen, all connected with a secular interpretation of reality and religion. George Eliot makes the same response. The novel's aim is to provide the reader with an ethical teaching, and this teaching is the necessity to reach a secular stage of morality and to become active in the external world.

This brings us to another series of problems, also related to the major one, which is the question of the relationship between the individual and the actual world. In the novel this problem is posed in religious terms, through the figure of Savonarola, who although a priest is nevertheless deeply involved with political matters, but also in cultural terms through the figures of Bardo and Piero di Cosimo. The question of the role of culture in society was another problem debated by Victorian intellectuals. Matthew Arnold emphasised the importance of the role of literature in the modern world. In the lecture On the Modern Element in Literature he maintains that one of the functions of literature was

[116] ibid., pp. 85-6

to fortify readers, so that they could find the energy to face the asperities of the modern world. In The Function of Criticism at the Present Time Arnold suggests that the function of criticism is to propagate knowledge in the world disinterestedly. The concept of disinterestedness is basic to Arnold's position in this respect. He emphasised the importance for intellectuals of not being interested in gaining anything from the matter at hand. In the Preface to Culture and Anarchy he maintains that intellectuals have to 'stand more aloof from the arena of politics at present'.[117] The problem is confronted in Romola when describing the role of the humanist intellectual who, like Bardo, has engaged in a dialogue with the dead and lives aloof from the external world without putting his knowledge at the service of mankind. Bardo fails in fulfilling his intellectual purposes; this means that George Eliot did not approve of his approach to culture. It is through the figure of Piero di Cosimo that George Eliot points out what the role of the intellectual in society is supposed to be according to her. Though Piero was a weird person, who wanted to live aloof from the world and from his fellowmen, he could not fail to get involved with the external world in order to give a careful artistic interpretation of reality. The fact that he lives aloof from the external world symbolises the need he felt to protect himself against the degeneracy of the civilised environment he lives in. Throughout the novel he provides the reader with an image of naturalness against the oversophistication of the external world. In spite of his weird personality and of his attitude towards the world, he offers the reader a valuable perspective on the moral and philosophical nature of his environment. In fact, as I have noticed beforehand, he has an acute sense of observation

[117] M. Arnold, 'Preface', in M. Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, London: Macmillan & Co., 1903,

and a deep insight into the other characters' personality and into events. He knows it is his duty as an artist to observe directly the world outside his studio. Actually, he offers a valid interpretation of the most important events of the novel. Through his figure George Eliot expresses her aesthetic ideas and offers also a valuable point of view of the story. The artist Piero is the symbol of the central and important role culture and the artist played in George Eliot's world.

From what we have said, it seems clear that George Eliot perceived a similarity between the Renaissance and Victorian England and in Romola created a network of correspondences between the two epochs. Throughout the novel she creates a link between past and present; she set the novel in Renaissance Florence, she analyses the main features of the age, but at the same time she discusses issues which, as I have noticed above, were typically Victorians. This fact can be read as an abandonment, a betrayal of the criteria of the historical novel genre. What Romola has often been criticised for is that George Eliot wrote unhistorically, that under cover of a 15th century story it is actually hidden a 19th century one. If we think of the final stage of Romola's *Bildung*, of her experience in the plague-stricken village, we cannot fail to think that the figure of Romola as the rescuer of this village's inhabitants is idealised. The whole episode is a fictional device used to bring the story to the final stage of the ethical teaching. But having noticed this continual negotiation between past and present and the presence of fictional devices, it still remains to understand why George Eliot would have chosen 15th century Florence as

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the setting for a Victorian story. Such a carefully chosen setting, the researches the author made in order to depict it in a detailed and truthful way cannot have been accidental. One of the answer to the question may be that it was easier for George Eliot to talk of serious and relevant matters, such as the role of the individual in a changing society, the dichotomy between obedience and freedom, the role of the woman, by placing them in a distant setting rather than in the English contemporary world. The other answer, which is actually strictly interrelated with this, is that 15th century Florence was for George Eliot the metaphor of the world. Romola's story symbolises the story of a woman belonging neither to the Renaissance nor to Victorian England, her destiny being human. What I think needs to be emphasised is that Romola's story is basically the story of a moral *Bildung*, which means that the description George Eliot gives us of 15th century Florence is strictly linked to the ethical aim. She parallels the relationship between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance with 19th century England in order to offer her reader an ethical guide.

As we have seen, in Romola George Eliot provided Victorian readers with a researched, well-informed and detailed picture of Renaissance Italy. She described the historical context truthfully and carefully, and she gave a thorough idea of the many-sided, lively cultural atmosphere one breathed in that context; she showed, in fact, that in that period the religious, the Humanist, the Renaissance tradition were all alive. Nevertheless, the view of Renaissance Italy emerging from the novel is that of a corrupt and morally degenerate period; the approach Eliot had in the novel towards that age is ethical. In fact,

the story of Romola is the story of an ethical search for values, a search which had to experience the Humanist, the Renaissance (therefore the pagan) and the religious attitude to life, and which, in the end, condemned the Renaissance view of life. The picture of Renaissance Florence we are given in Romola can not be separated from the moral *Bildung* the heroine undergoes; it was according to this aim that George Eliot described Florence at the close of 15th century in the terms we have analysed.

CONCLUSION

I think it is now possible to answer the questions raised in the Introduction. We can define the nature of the Italian interest in George Eliot, and point out the main features of the Victorian, and most of all of George Eliot's involvement in Italy.

First of all, we have enough elements to define the parabola of the English novelist's 'fortune' in Italy in the second half of 19th century. It is not an accident that I have isolated the word *fortune* by means of inverted commas; actually, it is contradictory to talk of George Eliot's fortune in that period. The Italian reception of her works was poor and limited; only Daniel Deronda was translated into Italian, and only one critical study appeared. This fact will not surprise the Italian reader, who is aware of the characteristics of 19th century Italian culture. Italian intellectuals were concerned with cultural problems strictly connected with the social, political , economic status quo. They certainly participated in the European cultural debate, which focused on Positivism, Realism and Naturalism. However, the English cultural influence was limited to the theoretical studies on Positivism, whereas, as far as literature was concerned, the major influence came from France. George Eliot's novels began to be translated into Italian at the beginning of the 20th century, and throughout the century Italian intellectuals showed interest in the works of the English novelist. The translations of her novels were usually preceded by introductions, which are actual critical essays. From the analysis of these studies it seems evident that the first ones are aimed at introducing the English novelist to

the Italian reader; they are in fact concerned with her biography, and with a general discussion of all her novels. The later essays, instead, focus on the novel which has been translated and give a critical reading of it. The first monograph about George Eliot appeared in 1935. It is a study naturally different both in its structure and in its aim from the introductions to the translations of the novels. The monograph in question is The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction by Mario Praz. It offers an interpretation of George Eliot's literature as a whole, emphasising those aspects of her works which can be considered Victorian, and those which are innovative in that context. The other significant studies appeared after Praz's are another monograph, by Pietro De Logu, whose reading of George Eliot's works is similar to Praz's, and a collection of essays about Middlemarch.

What I have noted as a general feature of these critical studies is that most of them focus on the realistic aspect of her art. The critics emphasise the novelist's commitment to a truthful representation of reality, and her concern with ordinary events and characters. The fact that Italian critics gave such a reading of George Eliot's works, and that some of them briefly compared her realistic attitude to that of Giovanni Verga supported my belief that it would have been useful and interesting to draw a comparison between Eliot and Verga's approaches towards Realism. The analysis of the two authors' theoretical declarations of Realism has showed that both aimed at giving a representation of life as they actually saw it, that they aimed at being impartial and truthful. Furthermore, they both chose to deal with everyday life. When describing it they intended to show things as

they really were without making them better. This similar realistic intention led to the employment of different narrative techniques, however. Verga's naturalistic works are characterised by the search for a narrative mode as impartial and objective as possible. His aim was to let characters and events represent themselves without the intervention of the writer. His naturalistic novels, in few words, are characterised by a dramatic representation of events. George Eliot, instead, did not seem to show a particular interest for a naturalistic search as far as narrative techniques were concerned. Actually, she employed the omniscient narrator's point of view; her novels, therefore, are characterised by the presence of the narrator explaining events, giving his opinions about what is happening and about the characters' choices. Nevertheless, the discussion about George Eliot's Realism has shown that in some of her novels she employs the free-indirect speech device, by which the readers are given the impression of reading the character's thoughts as if they were really expressing their opinions without the comment of the narrator.

As far as the analysis of the Victorian involvement in Italy and the study of the picture of Renaissance Italy as it appears in Romola are concerned, we can say that Victorian England certainly showed a widespread interest in Italy and its culture. This interest can be analysed in terms of development from Romantic sensationalism to a less idealised treatment of the subject; or in terms of a development from a picturesque and superficial approach towards Italy to a more profound picture of the country. However, a common theme runs in all Victorian works concerned with Italy. The country represented an alternative to the actual context the intellectuals lived in. It was represented either as

the country of the revival of learning, or as the uncontaminated South as opposed to the industrialised North. This led to a generally stereotyped image of Italy and to a description of the country which actually hid a picture of Victorian England. In Romola Renaissance Italy is represented as a complex period. George Eliot emphasises both the cultural liveliness and richness of 15th century Florence and the corruption and moral degeneracy characterising it. Her view of the Renaissance is, therefore, similar to Ruskin's in the emphasis given to the development of corruption and lasciviousness. Nevertheless, she represents it as a many-sided period characterised by the influence both of medieval, religious values and of pagan, Renaissance ones, in a way which anticipates Pater's and Symonds' picture of the period.

The representation of Renaissance Florence as it appears in the novel is linked with the ethical teaching implied in the story of Romola. The questions the novelist raises are all connected with the search for an ethical stage from which to reach a thorough understanding of reality and the right attitude towards the external world and our fellow-men. She discusses the problem of the validity of transcendental religion and of the mixture of spiritual and secular concern in the Church through the figure of Savonarola; she analyses the problem of when to rebel and of how to find a place in society, and she does so by describing the experiences of Savonarola and Romola. These questions all relate well to the Renaissance period they are set in; nevertheless, one cannot fail to notice that they were extremely relevant questions in the Victorian period. In Romola George Eliot created a network of correspondences between Victorian England and Renaissance

Florence. She conceived the two periods as similar in their transitional nature; they were both swinging between the collapse of the old world and the birth of a new one.

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